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BY B. AUERBACH

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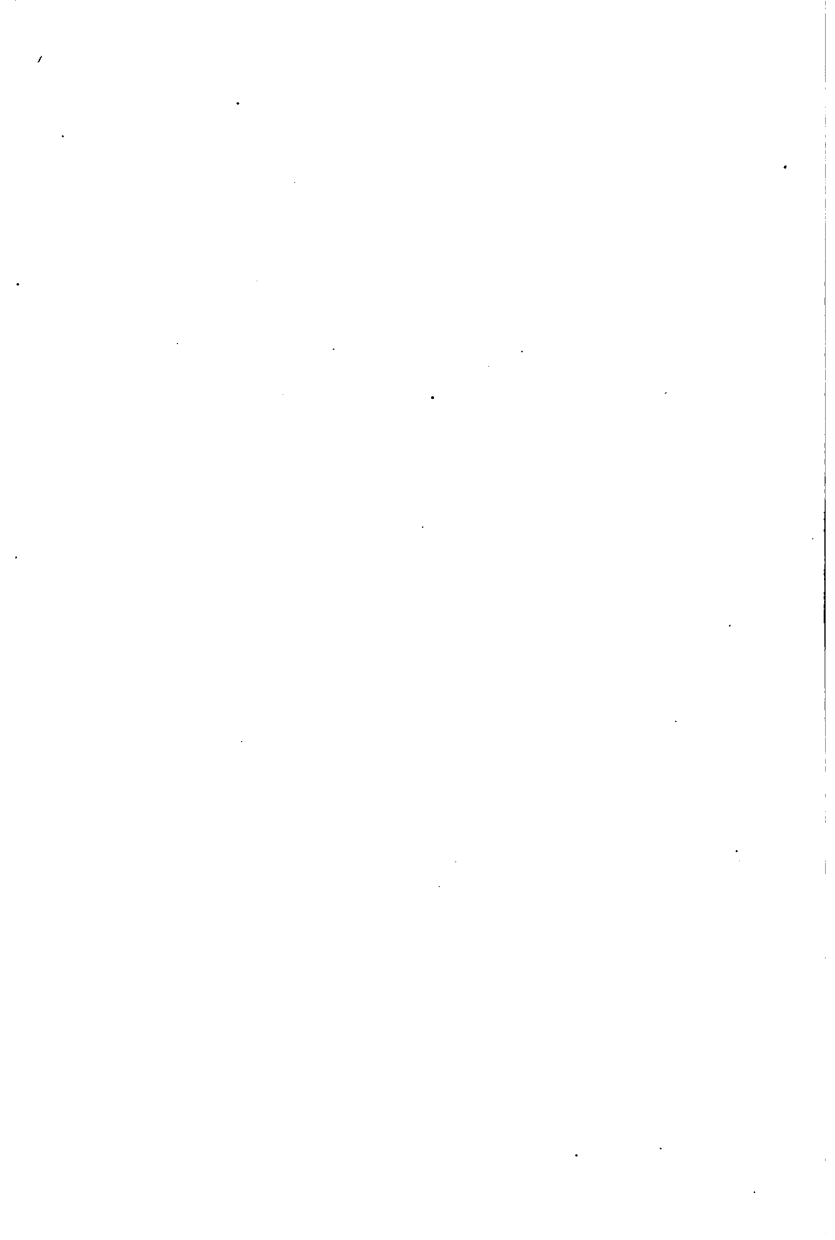
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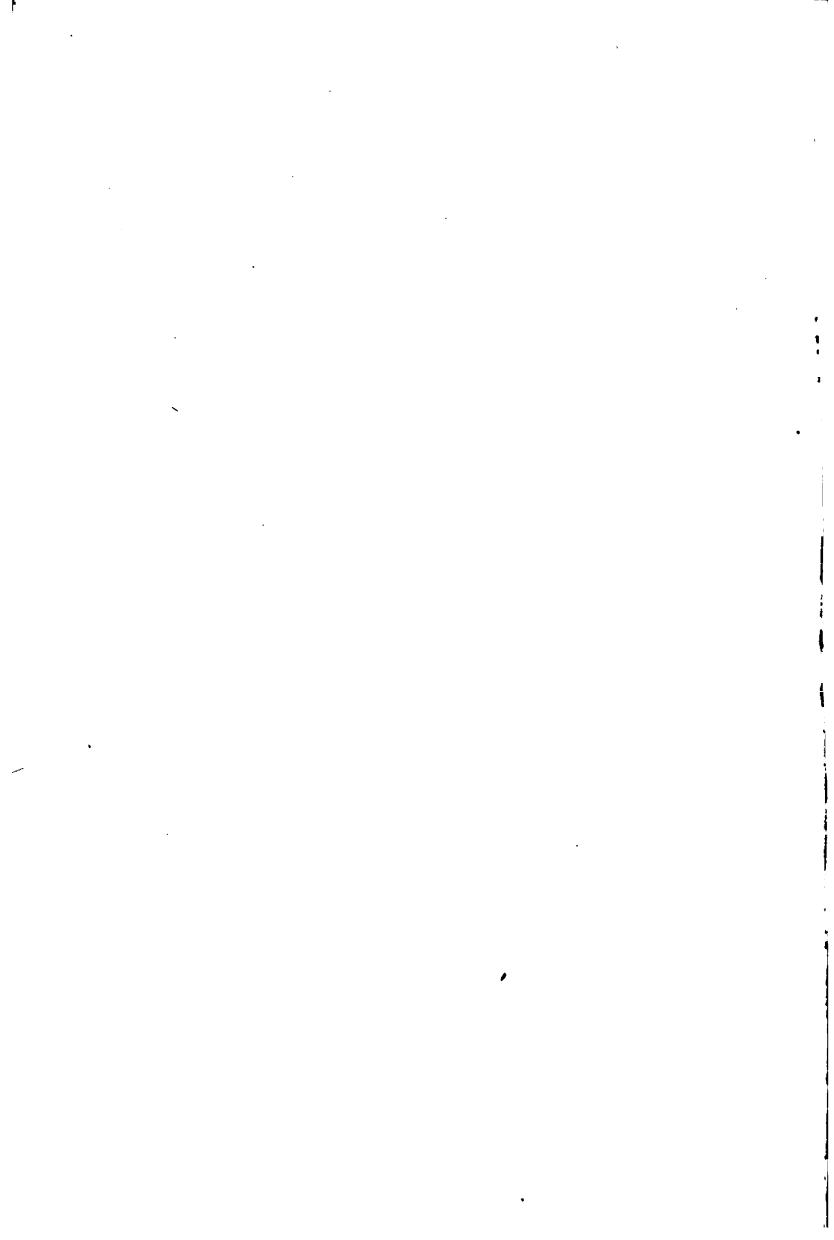
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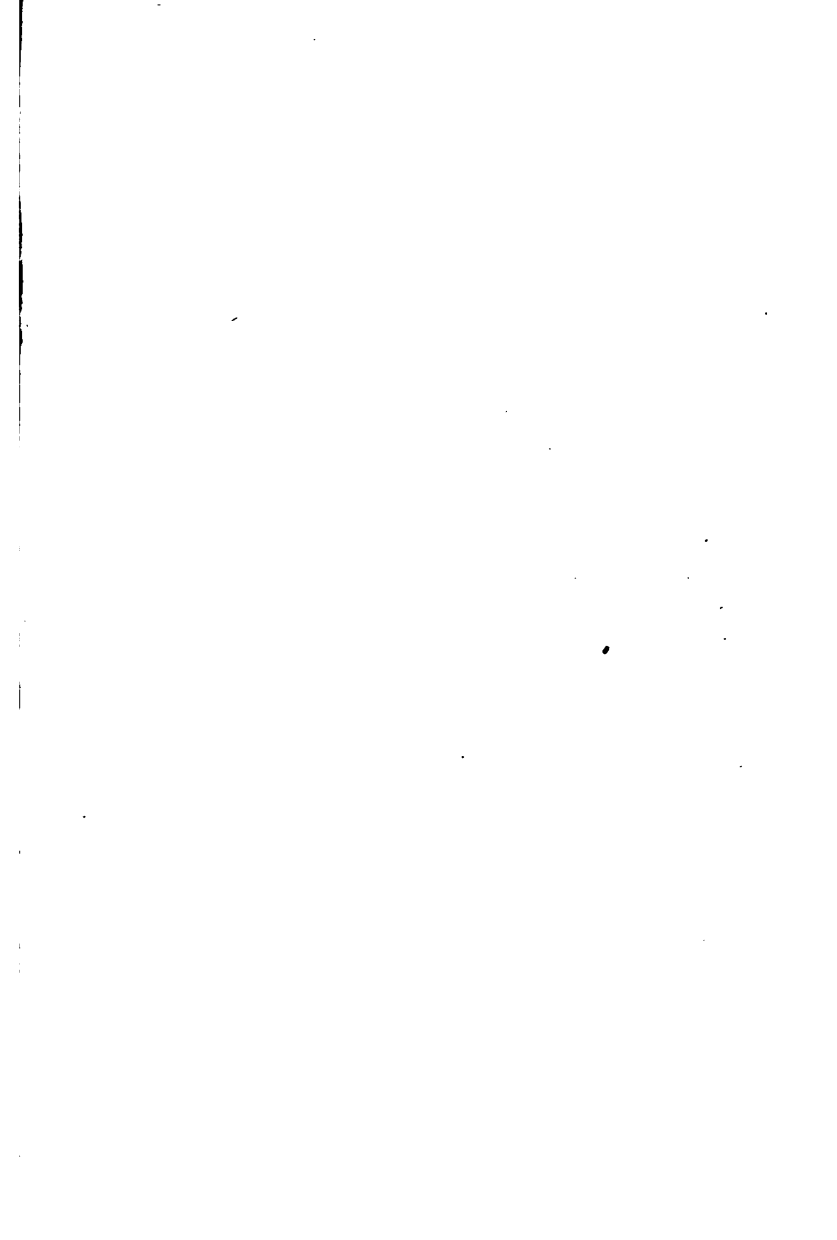
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VOL. I



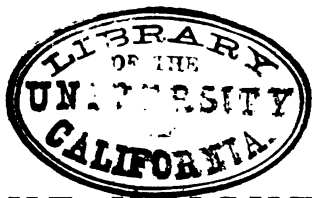
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ON THE HEIGHTS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY mass was being celebrated in the chapel attached to the royal summer palace.

The palace stood on a slight eminence in the centre of the park. The eastern slope of the hill had been planted with vineyards and its crest was covered with mighty, towering beeches. The park abounded with maples, plane trees and elms, with their rich foliage, and firs of various kinds, while the thick clusters of needles on the fir-leaved mountain pine, showed that it had become acclimated. On grassy lawns there were solitary tall pines of perfect growth. A charming variety of flowers and leaf plants lent grace to the picture which, in all its details, showed evidence of artistic design and exquisite taste.

The paths were neatly kept. The flowers were sparkling with the dews of morning; birds were singing and the air was laden with the fragrant perfume of the new-mown grass. Swans, and rare varieties of ducks from foreign lands, were swimming in the large lake, on the banks of which the bright-hued flamingo might also have been seen. The fountain in the centre of the lake sent its waters to such a height that they were lost in spray.

A clear mountain brook, running between alders and weeping-willows, and under many a rustic bridge, emptied into the lake, flowing thence through the valley until it reached the river, bright glimpses of which might here and there be caught through openings in the shrubbery.

Tables, chairs and benches of graceful form had been placed under the trees and at various points that commanded a fine prospect.

Seated near the chapel, there was a man of impressive appearance. His dress betokened scrupulous care. His thick hair was as white as his cravat. His eyes were blue and sparkling, and full

of youthful fire. He looked out upon the broad landscape, the valley crowded with fruit trees, the near-lying hills and the mountain beyond, whose lines stood out in bold relief against the blue sky above. He had a book in his hand, but now laid it aside and drank in the peaceful influences of the scene before him.

The great door of the chapel was open, the mighty sounds of the organ were heard, a soft cloud of incense floated out on the morning air and then vanished into space.

This impressive looking man was the king's physician, Doctor Gunther, who, being a protestant, had not attended mass.

Just then, a beautiful woman, carrying an open sunshade, stepped out from the verandah which was almost concealed by trellised vines. She wore a full, white robe, and her headdress was a simple morning cap with blue ribbons. Her bright, rosy face beamed with youth and beauty; her hair was of a golden hue and she seemed the very incarnation of glorious day.

The Doctor, hearing the rustling of her dress, had at once advanced and made his obeisance.

"Good morning, Doctor!" said the lady, whose two female companions had kept a few steps to the rear. Her voice was not clear and bright, but suggestive of the soulful violoncello-tone which is more properly the vehicle of intense and fervent feeling, than of loud-voiced joy.

"What a charming day!" continued the lady, "and yet, for that very reason, doubly sad to those who are obliged to pass it in a sick-room. How is our dear Countess Brinkenstein?"

"The Countess, may it please Your Majesty, may safely take the air for an hour to-day."

"I'm delighted to hear you say so. Sadness and sickness should indeed both be unknown in this lovely spot."

"The Countess must regard herself as doubly fortunate, now that she is able to perform the interesting duties that await her."

"Speak softly," suddenly said the queen, for the sounds of the organ had ceased; the time of the consecration had arrived. "Ah, dear Doctor, I should like to confide a secret to you."

The other ladies stepped aside, while the queen and the Doctor walked up and down on the open space in front of the chapel.

"From one's physician, nothing should be kept concealed," said the Doctor; "Your Majesty credited me, not long since, with the possession of a stethoscope by means of which I could note the movements of the soul itself."

"Yes," replied the queen, her face mantled with blushes, "I've already thought of applying to you for ghostly advice, but that were impracticable; such matters I must settle for myself. But I've a request to make of you as the physician."

"Your Majesty has but to command—"

"No, that can't be done in this instance. What I meant was—"

At that moment, the bell began to toll, and the king came out of the chapel. He wore the simple dress of a citizen and was without decorations of any kind. He was followed by the gentlemen and ladies of the court, the former of whom were also in citizen's dress, and, for the greater part, wore the picturesque costume of the mountaineers of that region.

The king was a man of stately appearance and erect bearing. He bowed to the queen from afar, and hastened forward to meet her. The ladies and gentlemen composing his train remained in the background exchanging kindly greetings. The king addressed a few words to the queen, whereat she smiled; he, too, seemed happy, and, offering her his arm, led her towards the pavilion. The ladies and gentlemen followed, indulging in cheerful and unconstrained conversation by the way.

A young lady, leaving the rest of the party, joined the Doctor and grasped his hand most cordially. She was of a tall and graceful figure; her hair and eyes were brown. She wore a simple, light-colored summer dress and a loose jacket which was open and revealed the full chemisette. A leather girdle studded with steel buttons encircled her waist. Her movements were easy and graceful; her expression, half earnest, half mischievous. "Might I ask," said she, addressing the Doctor, "the name of the book you've found worth reading on this lovely morning?"

"It was well worth reading, although, to tell the truth, I've not opened it," replied the Doctor, while he handed the little book to her. It was Horace.

"Oh, it's Latin!" said the lady. Her voice was as clear and bold as that of a chaffinch. "And this, I suppose, is your mass."

The Doctor briefly alluded to the success with which the ancient writers had compressed so many weighty and enduring thoughts into so small a volume.

The party entered the saloon, seating themselves as best pleased them, for the order of rank or precedence was not insisted on at breakfast. They were in the country and, with their uniforms, had laid aside many of the vexatious requirements of etiquette.

There is nothing more cheerful than a gay and unconstrained party at breakfast. All are still full of the new strength that refreshing sleep has lent them; society succeeds to solitude; and the spirits of all seem affected by the soft, dewy morn.

There were no servants at breakfast. The ladies waited on the company, which was almost as free and unconstrained as a family party. The Doctor drank nothing but tea which he himself prepared. The lady with the brown hair invited herself to a seat next to him and poured out the tea for him. At her left, sat Colonel Von Bronnen, the king's adjutant-general, and the only one, in fact, who did not seem to miss his uniform.

The party seemed in undress, mentally as well as physically, and there was much loud and confused talking.

"Dear me ! It 's Sunday !" said the young lady with the brown hair.

Uproarious laughter greeted her remark ; and when the queen enquired as to the cause of so much merriment, the Doctor informed her of the startling discovery which had just been made by Countess Irma von Wildenort. The queen smiled.

"I had thought," said the king, addressing the Countess and at the same time lighting his cigar—he was the only one who smoked in the saloon—"that with you every day was Sunday."

"Yes, Your Majesty, but only since I 've had the honor of being here. At the convent, Sunday was the only day on which we had cake, whilst here we have cake every day ; and so I am obliged to use some other means to find out which is Sunday."

Von Schnabelsdorf, who had recently visited Spain on service of a diplomatic nature and was now awaiting orders, was sitting opposite the Doctor. Addressing his conversation to the latter, he remarked that a friend of his who lived in Madrid had written a highly interesting work, to which he, also, had contributed a few ideas. It was soon to appear, and its subject was "Sunday," or rather, "The Sabbath."

The king had overheard his remarks and inquired as to what these ideas were. Schnabelsdorf replied that as seven corresponded with the quarter of the lunar month, it was a natural division, and that the institution of the Sabbath was older than all positive religions. He had apt quotations to support every statement and did not forget to lug in the names of his distinguished friends.

Von Schnabelsdorf's learned discourse failed to make a deep impression on the company, which continued in its cheerful vein until the queen rose, beckoning the Doctor to follow. The king offered her his arm and conducted her to a lovely seat under a weeping ash, on the slope of the lawn.

It was delightful to behold this royal pair, so tall and stately ; and the queen was doubly beautiful, for another life was budding within her own.

The queen seated herself and the king sat down beside her. Without waiting for orders, the Doctor drew up his chair and joined them.

"Yes," said the queen, "I must speak to you about it ; I must tell you of a pain—"

"Perhaps I had better withdraw," said the king.

"No ! you must remain. Once more, I ask you ; if God grants me health, may I not nurse the child that is to be mine?"

An almost imperceptible glance from the king informed the Doctor what answer he was to make to the queen.

"I have already had the honor of acquainting Your Majesty with my opinion of the superstitious belief that the mere performance

of maternal duties preserves the mother's beauty. Your wish is inspired by a feeling which, in itself, is beautiful. But, both for your own sake and that of the child, it were impossible to accede to it. The duties of a queen, the demands of etiquette, the need of your presence at court and the various emotions which these employments must necessarily occasion, render it out of the question. A high state of development has effects upon the nervous system, which effects, being transmitted to the child, must cling to it for life."

"I beg you, dear Mathilde," added the king, "to avoid distressing yourself. Consider the prince's welfare."

"Do n't always talk of a prince! Promise me you will be just as happy, if it be a princess—"

"Just as happy! No, that were impossible. I can't control my feelings to that extent. But this I can promise you—if you and the child are well, I shall be happy for all."

"Well, then, let a nurse be brought;—even now, I envy her the child's affectionate glances and hearty caresses!"

"And what is the sorrow you were complaining of?"

"The thought of depriving another child of its mother troubles my conscience. Even if thousands have done the same thing time and time again, he who commits a wrong, sins for himself and as deeply as if it were the first time the sin were ever committed. Yet, I submit. But I shall insist on one thing: the foster-mother of my child must be an honest married woman and must belong to a respectable family. I could never silence my conscience if I were to deprive a child, already wretched enough, of its all—its mother! In this I am perfectly indifferent to worldly regulations and prescribed forms. Is the poor, forlorn child, born into a hostile world, to be robbed of the only source of love yet left it? And even if we take an honest married woman, we will be depriving a child of its mother and inflicting an injury upon a being that we do not even know. Ah! how hard it is! In spite of our knowing better, we are yet forced to commit wrong. However, I shall submit to necessity. But the child that we take from its mother will be cared for by her family, has a father and, perhaps, even a kind grandmother and affectionate brothers and sisters. A hospitable roof will shelter its infant head—"

"Your Majesty" exclaimed the Doctor, with an outburst of enthusiasm, "at this very moment, prayers are being offered up for you in thousands of churches, and myriad voices are saying: 'Amen'!"

"Great God, what duties are thus imposed! One had needs be more than human to bear the charge—it crushes me to the earth."

"It should elevate instead of depressing you. At this very moment the breath issuing from millions of lips forms a cloud that supports you. True humanity is best shown when those who are

prosperous and happy and therefore need no assistance from others, protect the suffering instead of putting them away from them. The effect of such a mood upon the child whose heart throbs beneath that of its mother, is one of nature's mysteries. This child must needs become a noble, beautiful being, for its mother has instilled purest philanthropy into it before its birth."

The king, who had taken the queen's hand in his, now said :

"And so you really know nothing of the law. It is n't merely a family law that the princes and princesses of our house must be born in the royal palace—and for which reason, we shall return to the city to-morrow—but it is also a law of the court that the nurse of a prince must be a married woman."

"Great Heavens ! And how I 've been tormenting myself. In the future I shall think better of the customs of the court, since I find there are such beautiful ones among them."

"From the depths of your soul, Your Majesty has given new life to this law," interposed the Doctor, "a law is neither free nor sacred until it has become a living truth to us."

"Very pretty, and true besides," said the king. He dropped his cigar, and, after looking for it for a little while, said : "Excuse me, Doctor, but would n't you be kind enough to have cigars brought for us ?"

The Doctor went into the house and, after he had left, the king said :

"Pray tell me, Mathilde, was that all that troubled you ? I have for some time past, observed that there 's something on your mind—"

"Yes, there is something on my mind, but I can't speak of it, until it becomes an actual truth. It is nothing but love for you ; pray do n't ask me more at present. You 'll soon know all."

When the Doctor returned, he found the king alone, and sitting under the ash. The queen had withdrawn.

"Was the compliment you 've just paid the queen prompted by professional considerations ?" asked the king, with lowering eye.

"No, Your Majesty. I spoke sincerely and from conviction."

The king remained silent for a long time, his eyes resting on the ground. At last he arose and, moving his hand as if putting something far away from him, said :

"Well, the queen wishes the nurse to be a young woman from the Highlands and of a respectable family. Is there time enough left for you to journey there and select one ? Are you not a native of the Highlands ? That were—but no, you must not go now. Send Doctor Sixtus ; give him precise instructions, and let him go from village to village. He can propose several and you can select the best of them ; the others can be sent home with a gratuity, and—but act on your own judgment ; only, do n't fail to send the Doctor off this very day."

"Your Majesty's wishes shall be obeyed."

CHAPTER II.

“**H**OW radiant you look!” said Countess Irma, as she met the Doctor.

“Perhaps I do,” he replied, “for I’ve just beheld that divine sight,—a heart overflowing with pure love of its fellow beings;—but excuse me for a moment!” he said, interrupting himself and leaving the Countess, while he went into an adjoining apartment and dispatched a telegram to Doctor Sixtus, instructing him to prepare himself for an eight days’ journey, and to come to the summer palace forthwith. He then returned to the Countess, to whom he gave an account of what had happened.

“Shall I tell you what I think?” asked the Countess.

“You know very well that none dare say you ‘nay’.”

“Well, then, I can’t help thinking that it was far better in olden times; for then, royal children were born in some lonely out-of-the-way palace, as quietly as if it were to be kept a secret—”

The Doctor interrupted her: “You are indeed a true child of your father. For, although my dear friend Eberhard was full of strange fancies during his younger years, he would at times manifest sudden and surprising diffidence.”

“Ah, do tell me of my father! I know so little about him.”

“I’ve known nothing of him for many years. Of course you know that he has broken with me, because I am at court; but, in the olden times, in our youthful, enthusiastic days—”

“Then you, too, were once enthusiastic!”

“I was; but not to so great a degree as your father. When I see you, it seems as if his youthful ideal had become realized. In those days, when I was a young army surgeon, and he a still younger officer, we would indulge in fantasy pictures of the future, and what it might have in store for us. He never thought of a beloved one, or a wife, but would at one bound, as it were, clear all that lay between, and indulge himself with brain pictures of a child; a daughter, fresh, tender and lovely beyond comparison. And now, when I behold you, I look upon his ideal.”

“And so my father’s only ideal was a child?” asked Irma with pensive air, and looking earnestly into the Doctor’s eyes, “and yet for all that, he left his children to grow up among strangers, and all that I know of him I am obliged to learn from the lips of others. But I do n’t care to speak of myself at present, dear Doctor. I have a presentiment of the queen’s secret. I think I know what makes her so quiet and reserved.”

“My dear child,” said the Doctor, “if you really have a presentiment,—and that, moreover, in regard to a secret of their majesties—take my advice: Do n’t impart it to anyone, not even to the pillow on which you lay your head at night.”

"But if your knowing it would be of service to the queen? You ought to be her guide."

"We can only lead those who desire to be led."

"All I ask of you is to have an eye on certain signs. Did the queen say nothing when she was before the church a little while ago and heard the mass? Was n't she startled by a certain tone? Did n't you observe a certain inclination—"

By a motion of his hand, the Doctor signified that Irma had better stop, and added:

"My child, if you desire to live comfortably at court, you had better not try to solve riddles which those to whom they belong do n't care to solve for you. But, above all, let no one know—"

"Discretion, discretion; the same old text," said Irma, roguishly, her beautifully curved lips quivering with emotion.

"You are of a creative temperament, and are therefore out of place at court," said the Doctor. "You desire to assert your individuality, instead of giving way to prescribed forms; but it can't be done. Just observe Councilor Schnabelsdorf, who will be used up much sooner than he imagines. He is constantly offering or preparing something new—cooking, roasting, or stewing all sorts of interesting information for his masters—and his memory is an everlasting 'table, table, cover thyself.' Take my word for it, before a year goes round, they'll all be tired of him. He who wishes to remain a favorite must not thrust himself forward."

Irma assented to this opinion, but saw through his attempt to change the direction of the conversation, and at once returned to what she had intended to say.

"Pray tell me," said she roguishly, "when one takes a false step and, at the same time, injures himself, is it not called a misstep?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, let me tell you that the queen is in danger of making a misstep, which may be fraught with irreparable injury to her—"

"I'd prefer—" interrupted the Doctor.

"Ah! you'd prefer. Whenever you say that, you've something to find fault with."

"You've guessed it. I'd prefer your leaving the queen to divulge her secrets at her own pleasure. I thought you were a friend of hers—"

"And so I am."

"Well, and since I am your morning preacher to-day, let me give you another warning. You are in danger of becoming one of those ladies who have no friends of their own sex."

"Is that really so dreadful?"

"Most assuredly. You must have a female friend, or there is some fault in your disposition. Isolation, such as yours, warps

one's character, and, consciously or otherwise, in vanity. If, from among all the ladies here, you can't make a friend, the fault must lie in yourself."

"But there's no harm in my having a male friend, a friend like yourself."

"I could n't wish you a truer one."

Irma walked beside the Doctor in silence.

When they again reached the lawn in front of the palace, Irma said:

"Do you know that this lawn is dressed up every Saturday with false hay?"

"Less wit and more clearness, if you please."

"Pshaw! how officinal," said Irma, laughing. "Then allow me to tell you that the queen once said she was very fond of the odor of new-mown hay; and, ever since then, the intendant of the gardens has had the lawn mowed at least once a week. But as stubborn nature won't furnish hay quickly enough, they bring some from one of the outlying meadows and spread it about during the night. And yet they persist in saying that, in our age, princes are not deceived."

"I can find nothing wrong or laughable in the matter. The intendant is one of those who regard themselves as the pleasure-purveying providence of their masters and—"

"Pleasure-purveying providence!—that's excellent. What a happy thought! I shall hold fast to that. How can you say you've no wit? Why, you're brimful of delicious sarcasm. Oh dear, 'pleasure-purveying providence'!" said Irma, laughing heartily; and while laughing, more lovely than ever.

The Doctor found it no easy matter to lead the conversation back to the point at which it had been interrupted. Whenever he attempted a serious remark, she would look at him with a roguish expression and give way to laughter so hearty that he could not help joining in it. But when he at last said that he had heretofore given her credit for something more than mere occasional flashes of wit, and that he had, until now, supposed her capable of carrying on an argument, she quickly became the docile scholar, willing to be led by her master. And so skillfully did the Doctor use his arguments that she soon reflected his thoughts as if they were her own.

A tall and handsome page, with an aquiline nose and raven hair, approached the Countess.

"My lady," said he, "her majesty the queen awaits you in the music-room."

Irma excused herself to the Doctor, whose eyes followed her with a thoughtful gaze. In a little while the rich and metallic notes of Countess Irma's voice were heard.

"Eberhard used to sing delightfully," said the Doctor, directing

his steps towards the palace. When he approached the music-room, and saw that the canon, who had read the mass that morning, was about to enter, he hesitated.

The morning was soft and balmy; nature seemed wrapped in bliss. Every plant, every flower, thrives best in its native soil. Man alone is constantly creating new torments for himself. Could it be possible that the mischievous Countess was right, after all? But why should the queen wish to forsake the faith of her ancestors?

The Doctor retired to an arbor and read his Horace.

Doctor Sixtus presented himself before the dinner hour, and, while the company were seating themselves at table, rode off in the direction of the mountains.

That evening—it was mild and starlight—the court drove to the capital; for the corner-stone of the new arsenal was to be laid on the following day, with great pomp and military display.

CHAPTER III.

THE bells were ringing merrily. Their sounds were re-echoed by the rugged mountains, and then floated out over the lake, the smooth, green, glassy surface of which mirrored the forest-clad shores, the rocky crags and the skies above.

Crowds were issuing from the church, the only building at the upper end of the lake. The men, donning their green hats with the black cock plumes, took their pipes from their pockets and struck a light; the women busied themselves with their dress, adjusted the pointed, green hats, smoothed their aprons, and tied the broad streaming ends of their silk kerchiefs anew. Following after the old women, who are always the last to leave the church, there was a handsome young couple. The wife was tall and stout, the husband slender and hardy as a pine. His appearance showed the effects of the week's hard work. His pointed, green hat, on which there was no hunter's badge, was worn aslant; he took off his jacket and laid it over his shoulder, and then, with a smile which seemed somewhat out of keeping with his weather-beaten face, said:

"Do n't you see? This is much better. Now there's no danger of your getting squeezed in the crowd."

The young wife nodded assent.

A group of women and girls seemed to have been waiting for her. One of the older members of the party said:

"Walpurga, you should n't have done such a thing as walk all the way to church. You do n't know how near you are to your time, and sometimes there's too much of a good thing."

"It won't do me any harm," replied the young wife.

"And I've prayed for you this morning," said a young, saucy

maid, who wore a bunch of fresh flowers in her bosom. "When the priest prayed for the queen and asked God to help her in the hour of trial, I asked myself: What's the use of my worrying about the queen? There are enough praying for her without me; and so I thought of you and said, Amen, Walpurga!"

"Stasi, I'm sure you meant well," said Walpurga deprecatingly, "but I want no share in it. You never ought to do such a thing. It's wrong to change a prayer in that way."

"She's right," said the old woman, "Why, that 'ud be just the same as taking a false oath."

"Let it go for nothing, then," said the girl.

"It must be fine to be a queen," said the old woman, folding her hands. "At this very hour, in all the churches, millions are praying for her. If such a king and queen are n't good after all that, they must be awful wicked."

The old woman, who was the midwife of the neighborhood, was always listened to with great attention. She accompanied husband and wife for a part of the way, and gave them precise information as to where she might be found at any hour during the next few days. Then, taking the mountain path which led to her dwelling, she left them, the rest of the church-goers dropping off in various directions as they reached the lanes and by-paths leading to their farms. The children always kept in front, their parents following after them.

A party of girls, who were walking along hand in hand, had much to say to one another. But at last they, too, separated and joined their parents.

The young couple were alone on the road. The glaring rays of the noonday sun were reflected from the lake.

It was almost a full hour's walk to their house, and they had scarcely gone a few hundred steps, when the wife said:

"Hansei, I ought n't to have let Annamirl go."

"I'll run after her as fast as I can, I can catch up with her yet," said the husband.

"For God's sake, do n't!" said his wife, holding him fast. "I'd be all alone here on the highway. Stay here! It'll soon be all right again."

"Wait a second! Hold fast to the tree! That's it."

The husband rushed into the meadow, gathered up an armful of hay, placed it on the pile of stones by the wayside, and seated his wife upon it.

"I feel better, already," said the wife.

"Do n't talk now, rest yourself! Oh! dear me; if only a wagon were to come along; but there's neither man nor beast in sight. Just take a good rest and then I'll carry you home. You're not too heavy for me. I've carried heavier loads many a time."

"Do you mean to carry me, in broad daylight?" said the wife, laughing so heartily that she was obliged to rest her hand on the stones, to support herself. "You dear, good fellow! Much obliged, but there's no need of it. I'm all right now, and can walk." She got up briskly, and Hansei's face was radiant with joy.

"Thank God! Here comes the Doctor, in the very nick of time."

The Doctor, who lived in the neighboring town, was just turning the corner. Hansei raised his hat and requested him to take his wife into the carriage. He gladly consented, but Walpurga seemed loth to get in.

"I never rode in a carriage in all my life," said she, repeatedly.

"Everything must be tried, you know," said the Doctor, laughing, as he assisted her into the carriage. He told the husband that he might get up on the box, but he declined.

"I'll drive slowly," said the Doctor.

Hansei walked along by the side of the carriage, constantly casting happy glances at his wife.

"Now we're two thousand paces from home, now we're a thousand," said he, talking to himself, while his glances showed his gratitude to the Doctor, to the carriage that was kind enough to allow his wife to sit in it; and even to the horse from which he brushed the troublesome flies.

"Hansei is doing the horse a kindness," said the Doctor to the young wife. She did not answer, and the Doctor looked pleased with the husband, whom he had known for a long while as a wood-cutter in the royal forest. Hansei carried his hat in his hand and would now and then with his sleeve wipe the perspiration from his brow. His face was sunburnt and void of expression and, as he had not been a soldier, he wore no moustache. A shaggy beard, extending from his temples, encircled his long face; his forehead was, for the greater part, covered with thick, light hair; his short leather breeches displayed his great knees; the clocked, knitted leggings must surely have been a gift from his wife; the heavy hobnailed shoes had been used in many a mountain walk. Hansei walked along, beside the coach, with steady step and at last exclaimed: "We're home!"

The little cottage by the lake stood in the midst of a small garden; an old woman was at the gate, and called out: "So you ride home in the bargain."

"Yes, mother," answered the wife, who, with profuse thanks, took leave of the Doctor, while Hansei gratefully patted the horse that had safely brought her home.

"I'm going right off for Annamirl," said he; "keep some dinner for me."

"No, let's eat together; I'm hungry, too," exclaimed the wife,

while she laid her hymn-book aside, and removed her hat and jacket. She was good-looking, had a full, round, cheerful face, and large plaits of light hair encircled her brow. She forced herself to remain at the table and join in the meal with her husband and mother, but as soon as the last morsel had passed his lips, Hansei started on his errand.

It was high time for Annamirl to come. Before the chickens had gone to roost, the Sunday child, a screaming, fair-haired girl baby, had come.

Hansei was quite beside himself with joy and did not know what to do. He had not had a comfortable dinner and it seemed a great while since he had eaten anything. It was ever so long ago, for he had become a father since then; and it seemed as if years, instead of hours, had passed in the meanwhile. He cut off a large slice from the loaf; but when he got out of doors, where the birds were chirping so merrily and the starlings were so tame, he cried out: "Here! You shall have some too; I want you to know that I'm a father, and of a Sunday child at that!" He threw the soft bread crumbs to them, and the crust into the sea, saying: "Here, ye fish who feed us; to-day I'll feed you!" He was overflowing with goodwill to the whole world, but there was no one left on whom he could exercise it. He knew not where he should betake himself to. Suddenly, he spied the ladder leaning against the cherry-tree; he mounted it, plucked the cherries, and kept on eating until he quite forgot himself, and felt as if it were not he who was eating, but as if he were giving them to some one else. He no longer knew where or who he was, and at last began to fear that he was bewitched and would never be able to get down again. The telegraph wire ran by the house and almost touched the cherry-tree. Hansei looked at it as if to say: "Go, tell the whole world that I'm a father." He was delighted to see swallows and starlings sitting on the wire, and nodded to them, saying: "Do n't disturb yourselves, I'll not harm ye." And so he went on plucking cherries, and looking straight before him for ever so long.

Then the grandmother put her head out of the window and called to him: "Hansei, your wife wants you."

He hurried down from the tree, and when he entered the room his wife laughed at him heartily, for his lips were black and his face was streaked with the juice of cherries.

"So you've been pilfering. Do leave a few cherries for me!"

"I'll bring the ladder into your room, so that I shan't be able to go up into the tree again," said he, and there was merry laughter in the little cottage by the lake until the moon and stars looked down on it. The lamp in the little chamber was kept burning all night. The mother soon fell into a peaceful and happy slumber, and the Sunday child would whimper at times, but was easily quieted.

The grandmother was the only one awake—she had merely feigned sleep—and now sat on a footstool by the cradle of the new-born babe.

A bright star was shining overhead. It flickered and sparkled and, within the cottage, the face of the mother was resplendent with joy as indescribable as the radiance of the star above. A child of man had become mother of a child of man, and she who watched over them was the one from whom both these lives had sprung. The soft air seemed laden with song and the sounds of heavenly music, and the room itself, as if thronged with fluttering, smiling cherubs.

The old grandmother sat there, resting her chin on her hand and gazing at the star above, whose rays fell upon her face. She sat there with bated breath, feeling as if transported into another world. The glory of the Highest had descended upon the cottage, and, like a halo, now encircled the head of the grandmother, Walpurga and the infant.

"Mother! How brightly the stars are shining!" said Walpurga, awaking.

"Never fear, they'll keep on shining, even if you shut your eyes. Do go to sleep again!" answered the grandmother.

And, until the day broke, all lay hushed in slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

SEATED in an open carriage, Doctor Sixtus journeyed towards the Highlands.

The Doctor was a man of easy and winning address. While the present king was yet the crown prince, he had accompanied him on his travels and, in the society of nobles, had improved on the light and graceful manner which he had acquired during a three years' stay in Paris. Just as princes treat their inferiors and regard their service as a right, so, in turn, do courtiers abuse those who are under them. The court doctor had chosen for his lackey, one of the readiest, and most skillful at command.

"Give me a light, Baum!" said he; and the lackey, who was sitting beside the driver on the box, handed him a lighted match. With gentle condescension, Sixtus offered his cigar-case to the lackey, who gratefully helped himself to a cigar. He well knew that it would prove too strong for him, and that, if he attempted to smoke it, it would in all likelihood throw him into a cold sweat; but he knew also that it is a safe rule never to refuse a proffered favor.

The road was good and the ride a pleasant one. At the next station, the royal horses were sent back to the king's stables and a relay of fleet post-horses was taken. Doctor Sixtus had no need to trouble himself about such matters—Baum knew what was needed and attended to it.

"Baum, where were you born?" asked the court doctor.

Although Baum was startled by the question, he acted as if he had not heard it. He found it necessary to collect himself before he could reply. His features were agitated for a moment, but he quickly assumed a modest and innocent expression.

The Doctor repeated his question: "Baum, where were you born?"

With a face expressive of willingness to serve him in any way, Baum turned toward the Doctor and said:

"I come from the Highlands; far over there near the border; but I've never felt at home there."

Sixtus, whose question had been a casual one, had no desire to enquire further into Baum's history.

He was quite affable towards Baum, who was the favorite lackey at court, since he possessed the art of showing by his demeanor how highly he esteemed the exalted personages whom he served.

"Keep as near the telegraph as possible," had been the instructions given to Doctor Sixtus. "Report every morning and evening where a dispatch will reach you, so that you may be recalled at any moment."

Doctor Sixtus looked out at the telegraph wires, running through the valleys and climbing over the hills, and smiled to himself. "I, too, am nothing more than an electric spark, with this difference however: the master who has sent me does not know where I am going to. No, I am like the spirit in the fairy-tale; I bring money and luxury to an invisible cottage, for I cannot find a rich peasant woman. Where art thou, O noble foster-mother?"

He looked out at the landscape with a self-complacent smile, while, in his day-dreams, various images appeared and vanished like the smoke clouds of his cigar.

It was after dark when they drew near to a little watering-place in the Highlands.

While they ascended the mountain, the lackey walked on beside the postilion. Sixtus had entrusted him with the secret reason for their journey. They had already, in distant lands, shared in adventures of quite a different nature. Baum engaged the postilion in conversation about the life and ways of the neighborhood, and adroitly managed to inquire about young lying-in women. He had found the right party. The postilion was the son of a midwife, whose only fault was that she had died some time ago.

Sixtus was much gratified by the hint which he had just received of how his mission might be fulfilled. He would seek information from the midwives of every village, and, in order to avoid being overrun, would take good care not to let them know for whom the foster-mother was wanted. When Baum was about to return to his seat, Sixtus quietly called him and said: "During the whole of this journey, you're to address me simply as 'Herr Doctor'."

The lackey did not ask why, for that was no part of his business; nor did he conjecture as to the reason; he was a lackey and obeyed orders. "He who does more than he's ordered to do is good for nothing," were the words that Baroness Steigeneck's chamberlain had often impressed upon him, and whatever the chamberlain said was as a sacred law to Baum.

The little watering-place was full of life. The company had just left the table. Some were talking of the day's excursion; others, about that projected for the morrow. A young officer in civil dress, and a stout gentleman, appeared to be the wags of the assembly. There were jokes and laughter, and, in the background, a party were singing to the accompaniment of a piano that was out of tune. All seemed more or less excited. They had repaired to the Highlands to escape from *ennui*, and, having arrived there, found themselves bored in earnest; for there are but few to whom the beauties of nature afford constant and all-sufficient entertainment.

Luckily for Sixtus, no one recognized him, and Baum, who was without his livery, allowed no information to escape him. The Doctor looked upon the doings of the gentry about him with a certain aristocratic sense of superiority.

As the neighborhood abounded with goitres, he concluded to leave without making further enquiries.

On the following morning, they reached a small mountain village. Doctor Sixtus addressed himself to the village doctor, rode about the country with him for several days and, at last, left without having accomplished his mission. He, however, made a note of the names of several of the parties they had seen.

His knightly pride had well nigh left him. He had looked into the dwellings of want and had beheld so much that told of toil and misery, that the careless indifference with which beings of the same flesh and blood could live in palaces, seemed like a dream. In this outer world, existence is mere toil and care, nothing more than a painful effort to sustain life, with no other outlook than that of renewed toil and care on the morrow.

"A truce to sentiment," said the Doctor to himself. "Things happen thus in this fine world. Men and beasts are alike. The stag in the forest does n't ask what becomes of the bird, and the bird, unless it be a stork, does n't care what becomes of the frogs! Away with sentimentality and dreams of universal happiness!"

The Doctor traveled to and fro among the Highlands, always careful to keep near the telegraph stations, and, as instructed, reporting twice a day. He despaired of accomplishing his mission, and wrote to his chief that, although he could not find married women, there were lots of excellent unmarried ones. He therefore suggested that, as it would not do to deceive a queen, it would be well to have the most acceptable one married to her lover at once.

While awaiting a reply, he remained at a village near the lake, the resident physician of which had been a fellow-student of his.

The scarred face of the portly village doctor was refulgent with traces of the student cheer which in former days they had enjoyed in common. He was still provided with a never failing thirst and ready for all sorts of fun. His manners had become rustic and it was with a self-complacent feeling that Sixtus thought of the difference in their positions.

Doctor Kumpan—this was a nickname he had received while at the university—looked upon his friend's excursion in search of a nurse as if it were one of their old student escapades. He rode with him over hill and dale, never loth to make a slight detour, if, by that means, they might gain an inn, where he could gratify his hunger with a good meal, and his thirst with a drop of good wine—the more drops the better.

"So many of our customs," said Sixtus, one day, "are, at bottom, immoral. For instance, nurse-hunting."

Doctor Kumpan roared with laughter and said:

"And you too, Schniepel,"—the college nickname of Sixtus—"so you, also, are one of the new-fashioned friends of the people. You gentlemen, whose gloves are ever buttoned, treat the people far too gingerly. We, who live among them, know them far better. They're a pack of rogues and blockheads, just like their superiors; the only difference is that they're more honest about it. The only effect your care for them can have will be to make matters worse. How lucky it is that the trees in the forest grow without artificial irrigation!"

During these excursions, Doctor Kumpan gave free vent to his rough humor, and was so delighted with his wit that he could live three days on the recollection of one of his own wretched jokes.

Sixtus found himself ill at ease in the company of the village doctor, with whom it was necessary to keep on the same friendly footing as of yore; and, therefore, made an effort to hasten his departure.

He was about to take his leave—it was on the morning of the second Sunday following—when Doctor Kumpan said:

"I'm disgusted with myself for having been so stupid. I've got it! Mother nature herself, unconditioned and absolute—just as old Professor Genitivus, the son of his celebrated father, used to say, while he brought his fist down on his desk—Come along with me!"

They drove off in the direction of the lake.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY morning had come again and, with it, stirring times in the cottage by the lake. Godfather and godmother were there,

and, at the first tolling of the church bell, whose sounds floated on the air like so many invisible yet audible waves, a procession moved from the house. The grandmother carried the child upon a soft, downy pillow, over which a white cover had been spread; following after her, proudly walked the father, with a nosegay in his button-hole. Beside him, was the godfather, mine host of the Chamois, followed by tailor Schneck's wife and other females. A light-haired boy about five years old, and bearing a two-pronged twig of hazel in his hand, had also joined in the procession.

"What are you after, Waldl?" asked Hansei.

The boy did not answer. Mistress Schneck took his hand in hers and said: "Come along, Waldl!" and then turning to Hansei, she continued: "Do n't drive the child away! It's a good sign when a young boy goes along to the christening; the child will get a husband so much the sooner, and who knows but—" Hansei laughed to find that they were already thinking of a mate for his daughter.

While moving along in silent procession, they beheld another good omen. A swallow flew directly over the heads of the grandmother and the child, whereupon the former opened her great red umbrella and held it over herself and the babe.

Walpurga, unable to accompany them on their long walk to church, was obliged to remain at home. Her friend Stasi, who, on the previous Sunday, had altered the prayer for the queen in Walpurga's favor, remained to bear her company. Walpurga, seated in grandmother's arm chair, looked out of the latticed window, at the violets, the buttercups and the rosemary, the peaceful lake and the blue skies, while she listened to the sound of the church bell.

"This is the first time my babe goes out into the wide, wide world, and I'm not with it," said she; "and some day I shall go into the other world and never be with it again. And still I feel as if it was with me all the same."

"I do n't know what makes you so downhearted to-day," said her companion; "if that comes o' getting married, I'll never have a husband."

"Nonsense!" curtly replied Walpurga; her meaning was plain enough. Soon afterwards, she added in a voice tremulous with emotion: "I'm not downhearted. It's only this. I just feel as if the baby and I had both been born over again. I do n't know how it is, but I feel as if I were another person. Just think of it! In all my life, I've never lain abed so quietly and peacefully as I've been doing these many days. And to be lying there perfectly well, and with nothing to do but think, and sleep, and awake again, and nurse the baby, while kind folk are forever bringing whatever heart can wish for—I tell you, if I'd been a hermit in the woods for seven years, I could n't have done more thinking. It would

keep me busy day and night to tell you all. But what 's that?" said she, suddenly interrupting herself; "just then it seemed as if the whole house were shaking."

"I did n't notice anything. But your face is enough to give one the blues. Let 's sing something. Just try whether you 're still our best singer."

Her companion insisting, Walpurga at last began to sing, but soon stopped. Stasi essayed another song, but Walpurga did not care for it; indeed, none of them were to her liking that day.

"Let 's be quiet," said she at last. "Do n't worry me through all those songs; I do n't feel like doing anything to-day."

The bells were tolling for the third time. The two friends were sitting together in silence.

At last Stasi said: "How kind it is of the innkeeper to let them ride home from church in his wagon."

"Listen! I hear wheels. They can't be coming already."

"No, that 's the rattle of the Doctor's carriage. There he is, up there by the willows; and there 's another gentleman with him."

"Do n't talk to me now, Stasi," said the young mother; "let the whole world drive by; it 's all the same to me."

She sat there silently, resting her head against the back of the chair and looking out into the golden sunlight that seemed to infuse all nature with new life. The grass was of a lovelier green than ever before; the lake glittered with the soft sheen of the ever-changing light; the waves were plashing against the shore; a gentle breeze wafted the odors of the violets and rosemary from the window-shelf into the room.

A carriage stopped before the cottage. First, the loud cracking of a whip was heard; then, approaching footsteps and, at last, the jolly Doctor calling out: "Hansei! Is there no one at home?"

"No," answered Stasi, "there 's nobody but Walpurga and me," whereupon there was great laughter out of doors.

Doctor Kumpan entered the room, followed by the stranger, who started as if amazed. Moved with admiration by the sight he beheld, he bowed involuntarily; but, speedily checking himself, he was more erect than before.

"Where 's Hansei, the Sunday child's father?" enquired Doctor Kumpan.

The wife arose and said that he had gone to church with the child and its sponsors, but that he would soon return.

"Keep your seat!" said the Doctor. "I mean to be an unbidden guest at your christening dinner, and my friend here, who is also a man-killer like myself, will join us."

"What do you want of my husband? May n't I know?"

"The husband cuts the loaf and then helps his wife to some of it. You know that 's the custom of the country, Walpurga. We want to talk to your husband about a matter of great importance.

Do n't get frightened, it is n't a law affair. All I have to say to you is, you 've a Sunday child. Perhaps you 're one yourself?"

"I am, indeed."

"So much the better ; you 're doubly fortunate."

"It seems to me," said Doctor Sixtus, "we might as well speak to the wife at once. She appears to be a sensible woman and will be glad to make her husband and child happy."

Walpurga looked about her as if imploring help.

"Well then," said Doctor Kumpan, taking a seat, "you may as well let me tell it. Now, pay attention, Walpurga ! Just keep your seat and let me tell you a story : Once upon a time, there was a king and a queen. The king was good and brave, and the queen was lovely ; and a son was born to them who inherited the father's virtues and the mother's beauty ; it might have been a daughter, but they would rather have it a son. Now when the son was born, they summoned a spirit who lived in the palace, and was called Doctor Puck ; and they said to him : Puck, dear Puck, pack up your things, and pack yourself off to the mountains as fast as you can ; for there, by the border of the lake, is a pretty little cottage in which there sits a mother who 's tidy, strong and good, and who 's to be the foster-mother of the little prince, who is as good as his father, and as lovely as his mother. And the foster-mother shall have whatever her heart wishes for, and shall make her husband and child happy ; and the king and the queen and the prince, and — but look up, Walpurga ! look at this gentleman. He 's the kind spirit named Doctor Puck, and he comes from the king and queen. Do you understand me, Walpurga?"

The young mother rested her head upon the back of the chair and closed her eyes. She drew a long breath and uttered not a word. At that moment Hansei returned with the sponsor and the babe. The mother hurried to her child and taking it in her arms, rushed out into the garden with it, Stasi running after her.

"What 's the matter ?" asked Hansei, casting angry glances at the Doctor and the stranger.

"Sit down, my worthy Hansei, and I 'll tell you all about it. And it 's well that you 're here, too, my good friend of the Cham-ouis ; remain with us. The rest of you may all leave the room."

Suiting the action to the words, Doctor Kumpan hurried out the villagers, who had been drawn there by curiosity. Then, accepting a pinch of snuff from the innkeeper, he said : "Hansei, make a bow ; you must know that this gentleman is the court physician. He 's sent here by the king, who wants you to lend him your wife for a year."

The Doctor's overbearing manner so enraged Hansei, that he almost felt like putting him and the court doctor out of the room, and was already squaring his shoulders for the attack.

Motioning Kumpan to be silent, Sixtus told Hansei that, by the

king's orders, he had sought information in regard to him, and that it had seemed as if the people did not know whom to praise the most—Hansei or Walpurga. Hansei grinned self-complacently, and now Sixtus acquainted him with the king's pleasure.

"Many thanks for the kind words," replied Hansei, "I'm much obliged to the king for his good opinion of me. I know him well; I rowed him across the lake twice while he was yet a merry lad, and a wide-awake huntsman. Tell the king that I had n't thought he'd still remember me, but I can't part with my wife. I could n't be so cruel to her, to myself, and, above all, to our child."

It was the longest speech he had ever made. He wiped the perspiration from his brow, and turned towards the table. He was as hungry as a wolf, and, seeing the nicely cut cake, took a piece, exclaiming: "Before I do it, may this morsel—"

"Do n't swear!" cried the innkeeper, taking the cake from him. "Do n't swear; you can do as you please; no one can compel you."

"And no one wishes to," said Doctor Sixtus; "may I have a piece of cake?"

"To be sure you may! Help yourself,—and you, too, Doctor! We've wine also. Ah, Doctor, this day two weeks ago, out on the road, things looked very serious!"

There was eating and drinking, and with every morsel that Hansei swallowed, his face grew more cheerful.

"It seems to me, Mr. Landlord, that you could explain the matter to him better than we," said Sixtus. The innkeeper offered Hansei a pinch of snuff, with the words: "It would be a great honor to the village and to the whole neighborhood. Just think of it, Hansei! the king and the crown prince—"

"Perhaps it's a princess," interrupted Sixtus.

"Oh!" said Hansei, laughing, "and so the child is n't born yet?" But, while laughing, he thought to himself: "There's still time to think the matter over." Then he laughed again at the thought, for, with all his simplicity, he was rogue enough to determine to reap the greatest possible advantage from it; he could n't think of such a thing for less than a thousand—no, two thousand—and, who knows, perhaps even three thousand florins. Hansei would probably have gone up to a hundred thousand if the innkeeper had not resumed the conversation, and thus interrupted the current of his thoughts.

"Hansei's perfectly right; he says neither 'yes,' nor 'no'; he says nothing; for here the wife must decide. He's a good husband, and won't force her to do anything against her will. Yes, gentlemen, although we're only simple country folk, we know what's right."

"It does you credit to respect your wife so," said Doctor Sixtus. The innkeeper took another pinch of snuff and went on to say:

"Of course ; but after all, if I may be allowed to speak my mind freely, a woman's only half a man in reason and judgment. With your permission, Herr Court Doctor, I think we 'd better say no more for the present, but call the wife. She 's ever so good."

Happiness and misery, pride and humility, were depicted in Hansei's features.

"Whatever she says, I 'll abide by," said he.

He was proud of possessing such a wife, and yet dreaded her decision. He pulled at the buttons of his coat as if to make sure they were all there. At last, urged by the innkeeper, he went out into the garden and called Walpurga, who was still sitting under the cherry tree.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER Walpurga had hurried out into the garden and had pressed the babe to her bosom, she quietly gave it to Stasi, saying :

"Take the child ; I dare n't feed it now. O, you poor, dear thing ! They want to take me away from you. What harm have you ever done that they should treat you so ? And what have I done ? But they can't make me go ! And who 'd dare try ? But what have they come for ? Why to me ? Come darling, I 'm all right again. I 'm with you, and we 'll not part from each other. I 'm quite calm again."

When Hansei came to call Walpurga, he found her quietly pressing the child to her bosom and kissing its little hands.

"If you 've had your talk out, do come in."

Walpurga motioned him to be quiet, lest he should disturb the child. He stood there silently for awhile ; not a sound escaped father, mother or child ; naught was heard but the starlings in the cherry tree, who were feeding their young. Swift as the wind itself they would fly from their nests and return again. At last, the child, its hunger thoroughly sated, but its lips still softly moving, dropped back on the pillow.

"Come into the house," said Hansei, in a voice far gentler than his rough looks would have led one to expect. "Come in, Walpurga. There's no need of being rude, and there's nothing wrong in what they ask of us. They can't force us, you know, and we can thank them, at any rate. You can talk to strangers much better than I can. It's your turn to speak now ; and I 'll be satisfied with whatever you say or do."

Walpurga handed the child to the grandmother, and accompanied Hansei into the house. She looked back several times, and almost stumbled at the very threshold.

As soon as she entered the room, Doctor Sixtus came up to her, and, addressing her in a gentle, insinuating manner, said :

"My good woman! I should think it a sin to induce you to do anything that your heart condemns. But I feel it my duty to urge you to reflect upon the matter calmly and dispassionately."

"Many thanks. But—I hope you won't think ill of me—I could n't be so cruel to my child." Her eye fell on Hansei, and she quickly added, "Nor my husband either. I can't go away and leave them all alone."

"Why, they won't be alone; your mother's here," said the innkeeper, interrupting her. Doctor Sixtus interposed:

"Do n't interrupt her, if you please, sir. Let her speak for herself, and pour out her whole heart. Pray go on, my good woman."

"I've nothing more to say; I know nothing more. Yes, there's one thing more. I've never been in service, except to do an odd day's work, now and then. I was born in this cottage, and I've lived here up to this time, and 't was here my husband came to see me. I've never thought of leaving it, and I can't think of doing so now. I've never slept in a strange bed. If I had to leave here and go to the city for so long a time, I'd die of homesickness; and what would become of my child and my husband? I'm sure the king do n't want us all to die of grief."

"I'd like to say a word, too," said Doctor Kumpan, casting an expressive glance at Doctor Sixtus. "We've already thought of your child. You've often wished for a cow, and we'll get you one that has just calved."

"I've got the very thing you want," exclaimed the innkeeper, rushing to the window and calling to a boy outside: "Go tell my man to bring my heifer, right away. Be quick about it! Hurry yourself!—I really did n't care to part with her," said he, addressing Doctor Sixtus and turning his back on Hansei, who well knew that the innkeeper dealt in cattle and pigs, all the year around. Everything in his stable had its price, and here he was acting just as if the heifer were a member of his family. "She's the very best beast I've got," added he, "but one ought to give up everything for his king; and she's a bargain at forty crown thalers." Then turning to Hansei he said, with a grin: "You're getting a fine, plump little cow—not an empty hide."

"Not so fast, my friend," said Doctor Sixtus; "but if Hansei likes the heifer, I'll buy it of you."

"The mother goes, and the cow takes her place," muttered Walpurga, absently.

"I never thought you could be so foolish," thundered the innkeeper. "Why, what a fuss you're making! You ought to shout for joy, and get down on your knees and thank God!"

Doctor Sixtus quieted him, and the village doctor now said: "Joy and song come at no one's bidding; if Walpurga won't go with us cheerfully, we'll look further; there must be others besides her."

He arose, and took his hat as if to depart, Doctor Sixtus doing likewise.

"How soon would I have to go, and how long would I have to be away from home?" asked the young wife.

Seating himself again, Doctor Sixtus replied: "I can't say how soon, but you'd have to be ready to go at a moment's notice."

"Then I would n't have to go right off—and how long would I have to stay?"

"A year, or thereabouts."

"No, no! I won't go. God forgive me for giving it a moment's thought!"

"Then we'll take our leave, and may God bless you and your child," said Doctor Sixtus, offering her his hand. With a voice full of emotion, he added:

"It would do the royal child more harm than good if you were to leave here regretfully, and carry a constant grief about with you. That the mere idea pains you is quite natural. You could n't, as a good woman and true mother, have consented at once, and who knows whether I would have accepted you if you had? What the queen desires is a good woman, who has a respectable husband and a kind mother; she will have no other, and has no thought of grieving or offending you. Therefore, if you can't be cheerful among strangers; if it does n't gladden your heart to think that you may benefit the royal child, and that the king will be kind to you, you'll do far better to remain at home and not allow yourself to be tempted by the money. Do n't let that induce you. No; you'd better not go."

He was about to leave, when the innkeeper detained him and said:

"I've only one word more to say. Listen, Walpurga, and you, too, Hansei. You've said: 'No, I won't go,' and the answer does you great credit. But ask yourselves what the consequences will be? To-day, to-morrow, perhaps even the day after to-morrow, you'll be quite content—will take each other by the hand, kiss your child and say: 'Thank God! we've resisted temptation; we've remained united in poverty, and maintain ourselves honestly; we'd rather toil and suffer together than part.' But how will it be a day or a week later? how then? when sorrow and want and misfortune come—for we're only human after all—and you find yourselves helpless? Won't you say to yourselves: 'If we'd only consented.' Won't you then, by word or look, say to one another: 'Why did n't you urge me? Why did n't you decide to go?' I do n't want to persuade you, I merely want to remind you of all you ought to consider in the matter."

Silence ensued. The husband looked at his wife and then at the ground; the wife looked at him for awhile, and then suddenly raised her hand to her eyes.

The cracking of a whip was heard and then a fine, black-pied cow bellowing loud and deep, as if the sound issued from a cavern. All were startled. The sound broke upon the silence like a ghost-call at noonday.

The innkeeper cursed and swore, and, putting his head out of the window, abused the servant for not having brought the calf, which had, in truth, already been sold to the butcher.

The servant fastened the cow to the fence, and hurried home to bring its calf. The cow dragged at the rope, as if trying to strangle herself, and groaned and bellowed until she foamed at the mouth.

"That 's only a beast, and see how she goes on!" cried Walpurga.

The arrival of the cow seemed to dissipate the effect of the innkeeper's eloquence. But Walpurga suddenly composed herself. Speaking quickly, as if addressing an unseen being, and without looking at any one, she said:

"A man or a woman can do more than a beast!" Then, turning towards her husband, she added: "Come here, Hansei, give me your hand. Tell me, from the bottom of your heart, will you be satisfied with whatever I may do or say?"

"Do you mean if you say 'no'?" replied Hansei, hesitating.

"Whether I say 'yes' or 'no' is what I mean."

Hansei could not utter a word. Had he been able to speak, his remarks would have been very sensible. He kept looking into his hat, as if there to read the thoughts that were running through his head. Then he took his blue pocket-handkerchief, and twisted it up as if he were trying to make a ball of it.

When Walpurga found that Hansei did not answer, she said:

"I can't ask you to decide. I, alone, can do that. I'm the child's mother—I'm the wife, and . . . if I go, I must, and I'm sure I can, keep down all grief, so that I may do no harm to the other child; and—and—here's my hand, sir—my answer is 'yes'."

It seemed as if a load had been lifted from the hearts of all present. Hansei felt a stinging sensation in his eyes, and as if choking. To allay this, he indulged in a fresh glass of wine and a large slice of cake. What a strange day. If the company would only go, so that one could get a bite of something warm. The morning seemed as if it would never end.

The two physicians had much to say to Walpurga, who promised to keep herself as cheerful as possible. She told them that when she had once undertaken a thing she would carry it out; that God would help to preserve her child and that she would do all she could for the king's child. "You can depend upon it, when I've made up my mind to do a thing, I do it," she repeated again and again.

Now that she had decided, she seemed to have acquired won-

drous self-control. Spying her mother, who was carrying the child, she called her to her, and told her of everything. The child slumbered peacefully, and was placed in the cradle that stood in the bedroom. The grandmother seemed to look upon the whole affair as if it were an unalterable decree of fate. For years, it had been her wont to allow Walpurga to decide in all things, and in this case, moreover, the king's pleasure was to be regarded.

"Your child won't be motherless ; I understand her better than you do. We've got a cow, and we'll see that the child is well cared for."

The innkeeper hurried out and put the cow in the stable. That closed the purchase and gave him a pretty profit. He was provoked at himself to think that he had not asked ten thalers more. He managed to get two thalers additional, as a gratuity for the boy, but half of this sum found its way into his own pocket.

Hansei, who had in the meanwhile refreshed himself, thought it would be well to show that he was a man. He enquired as to the pay, and was just about to name the large sum he had been thinking of, when the innkeeper returned, and made it clear to him that the less he bargained the more he would get. He offered to give him five hundred florins for the christening gifts alone, and told him that, if he left it to the king, he would get all the more.

Walpurga now asked what she would have to take with her. Doctor Sixtus told her that her best suit would be all that was necessary.

Many of the villagers had gathered before the window. They had heard the news, and others, while on their way to afternoon church, stopped, and at last there was quite a crowd. There was much merriment, for every man said that he would gladly let the king borrow his wife for a year.

Stasi offered to help the grandmother. It was not without pride that she spoke of her being able to write a good hand and promised to send Walpurga a letter once a week, about the child, the husband, and the mother.

She then brought the plates, for it was high time they were at dinner. Walpurga said that she would put all to rights within the next few days.

"What I now deny my child," said she, "I can more than make up to her for the rest of her life."

While she was thus speaking, she heard the child crying in the other room and hurried to it.

The two physicians and the innkeeper were about to leave, when the sounds of a post-horn were heard in the direction of the road that led up from the lake.

A special post had arrived. The lackey whom Doctor Sixtus

had left at the telegraph station near by, was sitting in the open carriage. He raised his hand, in which he held a letter aloft. He stopped before the cottage and called out to the crowd :

"Shout huzza ! every one of you ! A crown prince was born an hour ago !"

They cheered again and again.

An old woman, bent double, suddenly turned towards the lackey and gazed into his face with her bright, brown eyes that, in spite of her years, were still sparkling.

"Whose voice is that ?" muttered the old woman to herself.

There was an almost imperceptible change in the features of the lackey, but the old woman had noticed it. "Clear the way, folks !" said he, "so that I may alight."

"Get out of the way, Zenza !" (Vincenza) "Old Zenza 's always in the way."

The old woman stood there, staring before her vacantly, as if in a waking dream. She was shoved aside, and lost the staff with which she had supported herself. The lackey tripped over it, but, without looking to the right or left, hurried into the cottage.

Doctor Sixtus advanced to meet him, took the dispatch and returned to the room. Walpurga had come back in the meanwhile, and he said to her :

"It has happened sooner than we expected. I 've just received a dispatch ; at ten o'clock this morning, the crown prince was born. I am to hurry off to the capital and bring the nurse with me. Now, Walpurga, is the time to prove your strength. We leave in an hour."

"I'm ready," said Walpurga resolutely. She felt so weak, however, that she was obliged to sit down.

CHAPTER VII.

THE two physicians, accompanied by the innkeeper, left the house. Stasi brought in the soup and the roast meat for the christening dinner and placed them on the table. The grandmother offered up a prayer, in which the others joined ; they all seated themselves at the table. Walpurga was the first to take a spoonful of the soup from the dish, but, finding that no one cared to eat, she filled her spoon again and said :

"Open your mouth, Hansei, and let me give you something to eat. Take this, and may God's blessing go with it. And just as the food I now offer you gives me more pleasure than if I were eating it myself, so, when I 'm among strangers, not a morsel will pass my lips that I would n't rather give you and the child. I only go away so that we may be able to live in peace and comfort hereafter. I shall think of you and mother and the child, by day and night, and, God willing, I 'll return again in health and happi-

ness. Do n't forget that God might have called me away in the hour of pain and trial, and that then you'd have been without me all your lifetime. Mother, I've often heard you say that a wife giving birth to a child has one foot in the grave. I'm only going away for a year, and you all know that I'll return the same Walpurga that I now am. Do n't let our parting be sad, Hansei; you must help me! You can, and I know you will. You're my only support. Keep yourself tidy while I'm gone. You'd better wear a good shirt every Sunday morning, for now you can afford it. You'll find them in the blue closet—on the upper right-hand shelf. Do eat something; I'll eat just as soon as you do. We need all our strength. You'll be all right to-morrow, and so shall I. But do eat something! For every spoonful you take, I'll take one, too;—there, that's it—but not so fast, or I can't keep up with you!" Smiling through her tears, she went on eating.

"And now, mother," she continued, "you'll have no chance to say that you're a burden to us. When I'm gone, you can take the two pillows off my bed and put them on yours, so that you can sleep with your head right high. That'll do you good. If we did n't have you, I would n't dare to think of going. Do n't spoil my husband, and, when I come back again, we'll fix up a little room for you where you can live as well as the first farmer's wife in the land."

They let her do all the talking, and when she said: "Do say something, Hansei," he replied: "You'd better keep on talking. I can hear my voice any time; but it'll be a long while before I listen to yours again. Who knows but—"

He was about to take a piece of meat, but he put it back on the plate. He could not eat another morsel; nor could the others. The grandmother arose and said grace.

Time flew by. A coach drove up to the door. The lackey was the only one seated in it; the gentlemen intended to follow shortly after. Baum speedily found himself on a familiar footing with Hansei. The first step towards their intimacy was the offer of a good cigar. He said that he envied Hansei's luck in having such a wife, and in being so fortunate into the bargain. Hansei felt greatly flattered. Doctor Sixtus gave orders that some bed cushions should be placed in the coach, so that Walpurga might be comfortable and well protected against the night air.

"Do you ride all night?" enquired Hansei.

"O no! We shall reach the capital by midnight."

"But your fast driving may hurt my wife."

"Do n't let that worry you. Your wife will be as well taken care of as the queen herself."

"I do n't know how it is, but when I look at this gentleman and hear him talk," said Hansei, looking Baum straight in the face, "I feel ever so queer."

"How so? Do I look so terrible?"

"God forbid! No, indeed! But the one I'm thinking of was a good-for-nothing fellow. No offense, I assure you. But old Zenza—there she is at the garden gate, watching us—had twins. One is named Thomas and the other was Wolfgang, or Jangerl, as they say hereabouts. Well, Jangerl joined the soldiers and went to America. It must have been some thirteen or fourteen years ago, and no one has ever heard of him since, and really—but you won't think ill of what I say?"

"Of course not! Go on."

"Well, Jangerl looked just like you to the very hair. No, not the hair, for his was red and his face was n't as fine as yours, either; but taking it all together, just as the devil takes the farmers"—Hansei was delighted with his joke, and the lackey joined in his laughter—"one might say that you look like each other. But you're sure you're not angry at what I've said?"

"Not at all," said Baum, looking at his watch. The clock in the church steeple was just striking five, and he said: "There's a difference of exactly one hour between your clock and that at the capital. Did this house belong to your parents?"

"No, I got it with my wife. That's to say, we still owe a mortgage of two hundred florins on it, but the farmer who holds it, does n't press us."

"Your wife can buy you another house, and you ought to consider yourself lucky to have so goodlooking a wife."

"Yes, and that's what makes me sorry to give her up," complained Hansei. "However, there are only three hundred and sixty-five days in a year—but that's a good many, after all."

"And as many nights in the bargain," said Baum, laughing. Poor Hansei shuddered.

"Yes, indeed!" said he. He felt that politeness required an answer on his part.

In the meanwhile, Walpurga had asked her mother and Stasi to leave her alone with the child. She was kneeling beside the cradle and wetted the pillow with her tears. She kissed the child, the coverlet, and cradle, and then, getting up, said: "Farewell! A thousand times, farewell!" She had dried her tears, and was about to leave the room, when the door opened from without and her mother entered.

"I'll help you," said she. "You'll be either twice as happy, or twice as miserable, when you return, and will make us just as happy or as miserable as you are."

Then she took Walpurga's left hand in hers, and, in a commanding voice, said: "Put your right hand on your child's head!"

"What's that for, mother?"

"Do as I bid you. Swear by your child's head and by the hand I hold in mine, that you'll remain good and pure, no matter what

temptations may assail you. Remember you're a wife, a mother, a daughter! Do you swear this with all your heart?"

"I do, mother, so help me God! But there's no need of such an oath."

"Very well," said the mother. "Now walk around the cradle three times with your face turned from it. I'll lead you; do n't stumble. Now you've taken the child's homesickness from it, and I'll take good care of it. Take my word for that."

She then led Walpurga into the room and, handing her the great loaf of bread and the knife, said:

"Cut a piece for yourself, before you go. May God bless it for your sake, and when you've reached your journey's end, let the bread that you've brought from home be the first morsel you eat. That'll kill the feeling of strangeness; and now, farewell."

They remained there in silence, holding each other by the hand.

Walpurga found it wondrous strange that Hansei was walking about in the garden with the lackey and forgetting her. Just then, he went up the ladder to get him some cherries, and was smoking incessantly; after that, he took him into the stable, where the cow had been placed.

The two physicians had returned, and Hansei had to be called into the room, for it was here, and not out of doors in the presence of the crowd, that the wife wished to take leave of her husband. Doctor Sixtus put a roll of crown thalers in Hansei's pocket. After that, Hansei constantly kept his hand there, and was loth to remove it.

"Give me your hand, Hansei," said Walpurga.

He loosened his grasp of the money and gave her his hand.

"Farewell, dear Hansei, and be a good man. I'll remain a good wife. . . . And now, God keep you, all of you!"

She kissed her mother and Stasi, and then, without once looking back, she hurried through the garden and seated herself in the carriage.

The cow in the stable bellowed and groaned, but the sounds were drowned by the postilion's fanfare.

During all this, old Zenza had been leaning against the garden gate; at times passing her hand over her face and rubbing her bright and sparkling eyes. And now, when the lackey passed her she stared at him so, that he asked, in a rough and yet not unkind voice:

"Do you want anything, mother?"

"Yes; I'm old, and a mother in the bargain. Hi-hi-hi!" said she, laughing, and the crowd hinted to the lackey that her mind often wandered.

"Is there anything you want?" asked the lackey again.

"Of course there is, if you'll give it to me."

With trembling hand, the lackey drew the large purse from his

pocket, and took out a piece of gold. But no, the night betray him. After fumbling with the money a long while, he passed the gold piece to the old woman, and said:

"This is from the king."

He mounted the box and never looked back again. The coach started off.

People came up to Zenza and asked her to show them what she had received, but her hand was closed as with a convulsive grasp. Without answering, she went away, supporting herself upon her staff.

She walked on, constantly looking at the ruts that the carriage wheels had made in the road, and those who passed her could hear her muttering unintelligibly. Her staff was in her right hand, and with her left she still clutched the gold piece.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE carriage moved along the road by the lake, and, at last, turning the corner at the stonepile, was out of sight. The hay on which Walpurga had rested a fortnight before was still lying in the same place.

They passed a handsome girl, dressed in once genteel, but now shabby, finery. She was of a powerful frame, tawny complexion, and her blue black hair was braided in thick plaits. She stared at Walpurga, but did not greet her until after she had passed.

"That's the daughter of the old woman you gave a present to," said Walpurga, addressing the lackey. "She goes by the name of Black Esther. If the mother does n't bury the money out of sight, she'll surely take it from her."

Although Baum turned towards Walpurga, he was not looking at her, but at the girl, who was no other than his sister. A little while ago he had denied his mother, while bestowing an alms upon her. And now he sat up beside the postilion, his arms folded as if to brace himself, for he felt as if his heart would break. His whole life passed before him and, now and then, he planted himself more firmly in his seat, lest he should fall. And now the carriage passed by a farmyard where, twenty years ago, he had, by his mother's order, stolen a goose. He was a slim lad then, and had found it easy to slip in, on all fours, through the gap in the hedge, which had closed up in the meanwhile.

Thomas, his twin brother, had joined the poachers. But Baum, who was not apt at their work, was glad when they took him for a soldier. One day while he was on duty at the palace, an old valet de chambre brought a letter from Baroness Steigeneck, who was then at the height of her power. The valet was kept waiting a long while, during which he chatted with Baum, to whom he took a great liking. He invited Baum to visit the Steigeneck pal-

ace, where they drank together in the servants' room and were exceedingly jolly.

"Why is your hair so red?" said the valet de chambre.

"Why? Because it grew so."

"But that can be remedied."

"Indeed! How so?"

The old man gave Baum the requisite directions.

"You must also change your name. Rauhensteiner is too hard for their lordships. It is difficult to pronounce, and particularly for those who have false teeth. You must take some such name as Beck, or Schulz, or Hecht, or Baum. For, mind you, a dog has no name except the one its master sees fit to call it by."

"'Baum' would suit me very well."

"Well then, let it be Baum." On his way home that night, he kept continually saying to himself, "Baum, Baum—that's a short and easy name and no one will know me." The old man had made him swear that he would have nothing more to do with his family. His recent visit to his native village had reminded him of his pledge, and, although he attached but little importance to an oath, he found it convenient and, as he thought, praiseworthy to keep this one.

Through the intercession of the Steigeneck valet, his military discharge was made out in the name of Wolfgang Rauhensteiner—surnamed Baum. After that, he was simply known as Baum, and none knew that he had ever borne another name. He was perfectly willing to forego his chance of any bequests that might be left to him under the name of Rauhensteiner.

He entered the service of the court, and his first position was as groom to the prince, while at the university and during his subsequent journey through Italy. As a precaution, he had gone home and obtained an emigrant's passport, and afterwards had dyed his hair black. In his native village, all were under the impression that he had emigrated.

After he returned from his travels, he married the daughter of the valet de chambre, and ever grew in favor with his masters. He was discreet in all things, and would cough behind his raised left hand. He was delighted with the name of "Baum." Such was his zeal to serve his masters, that, had it been possible, he would, for their sakes, have banished all harsh consonants from the language.

"That's settled," said Baum, as he sat on the box beside the postilion and coughed behind his hand. "That's settled"—and his face assumed a calm and determined expression as if he thought some one was watching him. "I've emigrated to America. If I were there, I'd be dead and buried as far as my family are concerned. Family, indeed! They'd only ruin and beggar me, and always be at my heels. None of that for me!" He watched

the people, many of whom he knew, walking along the road. "What a pitiful life these folks must lead—no pleasure the whole year round! Once a week, on Sunday, they get shaved and preached to, and the next morning the squalor begins anew. Any one who has escaped, would be a fool to think of returning to it again!"

Whilst Baum was thus recalling long-forgotten incidents of his past, Walpurga was trying hard to repress her tears. It seemed as if some higher power to whose sway she submitted herself had deprived her of thought and feeling.

With wondering eyes she gazed at the brooks that hurried down from the hills and then, as if to see what was becoming of Walpurga, would run along beside the road. When they dashed across the wooden bridges that overhung the roaring brook, she would tremble with fear, and would not feel reassured until they had gained the smooth road on the other side. She looked up at the mountains, the houses and the Alpine huts; she knew the names of those who dwelt in every one of them. But they soon reached a region to which she was a stranger.

At the next station where they stopped to change horses, the Sunday idlers were astonished to see a peasant woman descend from so elegant a carriage. A woman nursing her child was sitting under a linden tree near by. Prompted by curiosity, she raised herself in her seat, and the child turning its head at the same time, mother and child were staring at Walpurga, who nodded to them kindly, while her eyes filled with tears and her throat seemed to close. The postilion blew his horn, the horses started off at a gallop, and Walpurga again felt as if flying through the air.

"This is fast traveling, Walpurga, is n't it?" exclaimed Baum. When she now looked at him, she, too, was startled by his wonderful resemblance to Thomas.

"Yes, indeed!" said she. The Doctor said but little, for he was too deeply moved by sympathy for her. Nor did he, as usual, assert his pride of position. This woman was so much more than a mere tool that one might well treat her with kindness and consideration. She had found it so hard to leave her home. He was, for some time, considering what he should say to her and, at last, enquired:

"Do you like your doctor?"

"Yes, indeed I do! He's very odd. He scolds and abuses everybody; but for all that, he does good wherever he can, be it day or night; rich and poor are all the same to him. O, he's a real good man!"

Doctor Sixtus smiled and asked her:

"I did n't get to see his wife. Do you know her?"

"Of course I do. It's Hedwig, the apothecary's daughter.

Her family are very nice folks, and she's a sweet, charming creature; plain in her ways and quite a home body. They have fine children, too,—five or six of them, I believe—and so she has her hands full. He might have taken you to his house, for it's ever so neat and tidy."

He was delighted with Walpurga's good report of his friend. And now that he had succeeded in changing the train of her thoughts, he concluded that he had done enough and could leave her to shift for herself.

She saw everything as if in a dream. There were fields and meadows, then a village, a window-shelf covered with carnations and hanging vines. You've such at home, too, thought she, and in a moment they had vanished from sight. Then they passed the churchyard, its black crosses half buried in the earth and yet standing out boldly against the clear sky. In the village there was music and dancing, and merry youths and maidens, their faces flushed by their sport, hurried to the windows. Then they passed more fields and meadows and houses, and saw groups sitting together and talking. And then the postilion blew a loud blast. A child was running in the middle of the road. With a shriek of horror, the mother rescued it and hastened away. The carriage did not stop. Walpurga looked back, feeling sure that they must now be thanking God for the child's escape. And still they went on. Then they passed a cow grazing by the wayside, a boy near by watching her. In the level country where the climate is so much milder, the cherry trees were already bare of fruit. And then they came to great fields, with their vast sea of waving grain—there were none such in the Highlands. . . . How happy these people must be who live down here, where there is something more than water, meadow and forest. In yonder fallow field, there lies a plough as if sleeping over Sunday. It grows dark, lights begin to twinkle; there are men and women, too. They are in their homes, but I'm being taken away from mine.

. . . At the next post station, both the Doctor and Walpurga remained in the carriage. The horses were quickly changed, the old ones going, with heavy steps, into the stable; a new postilion mounted the box, and they were off again. Walpurga saw nothing more; her eyes were closed, and it seemed as if it were a dream, when the carriage stopped again for a fresh relay of horses, and she heard Baum ordering the postilion not to blow his horn lest he might awaken those inside.

"I'm not asleep," said the Doctor.

"Nor am I! Just blow your horn, postilion," said Walpurga.

The postilion blew a loud blast, and they were off again. The stars were glittering overhead. They passed through more villages; windows were quickly raised, but they dashed by so rapidly that they were out of sight before the surprised villagers had time

to collect their senses. Objects at the wayside were strangely illumined by the ever-moving glimmer of the two carriage lamps, and at last, in the distance, they descried a great light and, over it, a cloud of smoke.

"There 's an illumination in the city!" exclaimed Baum. "The horses were urged to greater speed, and the postilion blew his horn more merrily than before. They were, at last, in the capital.

The carriage made slow headway through the surging, joyous crowd that filled the streets.

"Here comes the crown prince's nurse," was soon noised about, and the merry crowd greeted Walpurga with loud cheers. Confused and abashed, she hid her face in her hands. At last they were safely in the courtyard of the palace.

CHAPTER IX.

WALPURGA found herself in the interior quadrangle of the palace. She was quite giddy with looking at the many doors, the great windows, the broad staircases and the coats of arms, emblazoned with figures of wild men and beasts. All seemed wondrous strange under the glare of the gas lamps, the strong lights, here and there, contrasting with the deep, mysterious shadows. Walpurga stared about her with a dreamy, vacant gaze. Giving way to memories of olden legends, she thought of the young mother whom the genii of the mountain had carried off to a subterranean cavern, where they detained her by means of a magic charm, while she nursed a new-born babe.

But she was recalled to herself at last. From the palace-guard, where the muskets were stacked in two long rows and the sentry was marching to and fro, she heard one of the songs of her home.

"The captain of the palace-guard has sent wine to the soldiers," said a young liveried servant addressing Baum, whom he assisted to unharness the horses: "the whole town will be drunk."

Walpurga felt like telling them that they should not permit the soldiers to sing so loudly, because the young mother who was lying overhead ought to sleep. She had no idea of the great size of the palace, but was soon to find it out.

"Come with me," said Doctor Sixtus; "I'll conduct you to the first lady of the bed-chamber. Have no fear! You will be cordially welcomed by all."

"I'd better bring my pillows with me," answered Walpurga.

"Never mind; Baum will attend to them."

Walpurga followed after the Doctor. They ascended a staircase, brilliantly illuminated and decorated with flowers, and Walpurga felt ashamed at the thought of her coming empty-handed, just as if there was nothing she could call her own. "I'm not that poor, after all," said she, almost audibly.

They reached the grand corridor. It was also brilliantly illuminated and filled with flowers. There were people in uniform, walking to and fro, but the soft carpets prevented their footsteps from being heard. The under servants remained standing while Sixtus and Walpurga passed by them. At last they stopped before a door. Addressing the servant who was stationed there Doctor Sixtus said :

"Inform her excellency that Doctor Sixtus is in waiting, and that he has brought the nurse."

This was the first time Walpurga had heard herself spoken of as "the nurse," and as being "brought."

She again felt as if under a spell, or rather, as if sold. But she plucked up courage, and suddenly it seemed to her as if she were seated, as she often had been, in a boat on the lake ; as if she were plying the oars with her strong arms—a furious wind resisting her progress, and the waves rising wildly on high. But she was strong, and rowed with a steady hand, and at last conquered the wind and the waves. She stiffened her arms and clenched her fists as if to grasp the oars more firmly.

The servant soon returned, and held the door open while Doctor Sixtus and Walpurga entered a large, well-lighted apartment. A tall, thin lady, clad in a dress of black satin, was seated in an armchair near the table. She arose for a moment, but resumed her seat immediately. It is no trifling matter to be first lady of the bed-chamber at the birth of a crown prince. This had been a great day with Countess Brinkenstein. Her name had been inscribed for all time in the great official record of the day.

Although she always judged her actions by a severe standard, she had reason to be satisfied with herself that day. While the court and capital were all commotion, she had been perfectly calm. She had kept up the dignity of the court and, moreover, of the king, who had shown himself strangely weak and excited.

She was resting on her laurels. One circumstance had greatly vexed her and had not yet been dismissed from her mind ; but as she had a firm will, she controlled her feelings. She was always self-possessed, because she always knew just what was to be done.

To have waited so long before securing a nurse was a thing unheard of. Many had offered themselves, and, among them, some who belonged to good families ; that is, of the nobility who had married lower officials. Countess Brinkenstein regarded the queen's resolve that the nurse must be of the common people—a peasant woman, indeed—as overstrained fastidiousness ; there could be no harm in referring to princely errors in such terms. The preserver of decorum was therefore determined to assume the responsibility of filling the post with a nurse of her own choice, when the Doctor's telegram, informing them that he had secured

the ideal peasant woman, was received. Her displeasure at the queen's behavior was now transferred to the peasant woman, who was as yet a stranger to her, and who would, in all likelihood, bring trouble into the palace. But, after all, what were rules and regulations made for? By consistently observing them, all would yet be well.

When the peasant woman was announced, Countess Brinkenstein arose, her stern features softened by the noble thought that this poor woman ought not to suffer because of the queen's newly-acquired love for the people; a love which would only render its objects the more unhappy and discontented.

The Doctor presented Walpurga, and spoke of her in such terms that she cast down her eyes, abashed at his praise.

Addressing Countess Brinkenstein in French, he told her how difficult it had been to secure this, the fairest and best woman in the Highlands. Answering in the same tongue, the Countess congratulated him upon his success and commented on Walpurga's healthy appearance. Finally she enquired, still in French:

"Has she good teeth?"

The Doctor turned to Walpurga, saying:

"Her ladyship thinks you can't laugh."

Walpurga smiled, and the Countess praised her perfect teeth. She then touched the bell on the table and a lackey appeared.

"Tell privy councilor Gunther," said she, "that I await him here, and that the nurse of his royal highness has arrived."

The lackey left the room. The Countess now touched the bell twice; a tall lady, advanced in years, and wearing long, corkscrew curls, appeared, and bowed so low that Walpurga imagined she intended to sit down on the floor.

"Come nearer, dear Kramer," said the Countess. "This is the nurse of his royal highness; she is in your especial charge. Take her to your room and let her have something to eat. What shall it be, Doctor?"

"Good beef broth will do very well."

"Go with Kramer," said the Countess, addressing Walpurga, and smiling graciously. "Whenever you want anything, dear child, ask her for it. God be with you!"

The lady with the corkscrew curls, offering her hand to Walpurga, said: "Come with me, my good woman."

Walpurga nodded a grateful assent.

And so, after all, there was some one to take her by the hand and speak German to her. And they were kind words, too, for the old lady had addressed her as "dear child," and mademoiselle as "my good woman." While they were speaking French, it had seemed as if she were betrayed, for she could not help feeling that they were talking of her. Mademoiselle Kramer now conducted her to the second room beyond.

"And now let me bid you welcome!" said the lady, while her homely face suddenly acquired a charming expression. "Give me both hands. Let us be good friends, for we'll always be together, by day and by night! They call me the chief-stewardess."

"And I'm called Walpurga."

"A pretty name, too! I think you'll keep it."

"Keep my name! Why, who can take it from me? I was christened Walpurga, and I've been called so ever since childhood."

"Don't agitate yourself, dear Walpurga," said the stewardess, with much feeling. "Yes, pray be calm," added she, "and, whenever anything displeases you, tell me of it, and I'll see that it is remedied. You ought to be contented and happy always; and now, sit in this armchair, or if you'd rather lie on the sofa and rest yourself, do so. Make yourself perfectly at home."

"This will do very well," said Walpurga, ensconcing herself in the great armchair and resting her hands upon her knees. Mademoiselle Kramer now ordered one of the serving-maids to bring in some good beef broth and wheaten bread for the nurse. Turning towards Walpurga, she saw that she was crying bitterly.

"For God's sake, what's the matter? You're not frightened or worried about anything? What are you crying for?"

"Let me cry. It does me good. My heart's been heavy for ever so long. I suppose you'll let me cry when I can't help it. I did n't know what I was doing when I said 'yes.' God's my witness, I never thought it would be like this!"

"What has happened? Who has done anything to you? For God's sake, don't cry; it will do you harm, and I'll be reprimanded for having allowed it. Just tell me what you want; I'll do all I can for you."

"All I want of you is to let me cry. O my child! O Hansei! O mother!—But now I'm all right again. I'll be calm. I'm here now, and must make the best of it."

The soup was brought. Mademoiselle Kramer held a spoonful to Walpurga's lips, and said:

"Take something, my dear, and you'll soon feel better."

"I do n't want any broth. Am I to be treated as if I were sick, and forced to eat what I do n't like? If there was anyone in the house who could make porridge, I'd rather have that than anything else. I'll go into the kitchen and make some myself."

Mademoiselle Kramer was in despair. To her great relief, there was a knock at the door. Doctor Gunther, the king's physician, entered, accompanied by Doctor Sixtus. He held out his hand to the nurse, and said:

"God greet you, Walpurga of the cottage by the lake! You've made a good catch in coming to this house. Don't be alarmed by the ways of the palace, and do just as you would at home."

Take my word for it, water is needed for cooking, all the world over. The folks here are just as they are in your neighborhood—just as good and just as bad; just as wise and just as stupid; with this difference, however—here they know how to hide their wickedness and stupidity.”

Doctor Gunther had, in part, used the Highland dialect while addressing her, and her face suddenly brightened.

“Thank you! thank you! I’ll remember what you tell me,” said she, cheerfully.

Mademoiselle Kramer now introduced the great question of the day—beef broth or porridge. Doctor Gunther laughed, and said:

“Why porridge, to be sure; that’s the best. In fact, Walpurga, all you need do is to say what you’ve been used to at home and you shall have it here, provided it is neither sour nor fat.”

Addressing his colleague, he added:

“We’ll keep the nurse on her accustomed diet for the present, and afterwards can gradually bring about a change. Come here, Walpurga, and let me look into your eyes. I’ve something to tell you. In a quarter of an hour from now, you’re to appear before the queen. Do n’t be alarmed, no one will harm you. She merely wishes to see you. Do n’t fail to prove that your eyes are right, when they say they belong to a clever head. Address the queen calmly and if, as is quite likely, you still feel a homesick yearning for your child and the others you’ve left behind you, do n’t show it while you are with the queen. You might cause her to weep and make her ill, for she’s very delicate. Do you quite understand me?”

“I do, indeed! I’ll be very careful. I’ll cheer her up.”

“You must not do that either. Remain perfectly calm and composed; speak but little, and in a low voice. Try to get out of the room as soon as you can, for she needs all the sleep she can get.”

“I’ll do everything just as you say. You can depend on me,” said Walpurga. “Are n’t you going along?”

“No; you’ll meet me there. But now, take something to eat. Here comes the porridge. I hope it will do you good. You need n’t eat it all; half will do for the present. But wait a little while until it cools. Come with me a moment. I suppose you’re not afraid to go with me?”

“No; it seems as if I’d often heard your voice before.”

“Very likely! I am also from the Highlands, and have already been in your father’s house. If I am not mistaken, your mother was from our region. Was she not in service with the freehold farmer?”

“She was, indeed.”

“Well then, your mother’s a good woman, and do n’t forget to tell the queen that she’s taking good care of your child. That

will please her. I knew your father, too; he was a merry soul, and perfectly honest."

Walpurga felt happy to know that her parents were well thought of and that the others had heard them so favorably mentioned. If the Doctor who had known her father had been that father himself, she could not have been more willing to accompany him into the adjoining room. He returned, in a few moments, and left in the company of Doctor Sixtus; and then Walpurga came, her eyes bent on the ground. When she at last looked up, she was glad there was no one in the room but Mademoiselle Kramer.

Her thoughts must have been of home, for she suddenly exclaimed:

"Dear me! I've got you, yet." She then took from her pocket the piece of bread which her mother had given her. And thus the first morsel she ate while in the palace, was brought from home, and was of her mother's baking. Her mother had told her that this would cure her of homesickness; and she really found it so, for, with every mouthful, she became more cheerful.

If seven queens were to have come just then, she would not have been afraid of them, and her crying was at an end.

She ate all the crumbs that had fallen into her lap, as if they had some sacred potency. After that she tried a little of the porridge.

"Can't I go somewhere to wash my face and dress my hair?" asked she.

"Of course. Doctor Gunther has given orders that you should."

"I do n't need orders for everything I do!" said Walpurga, defiantly.

Mademoiselle Kramer wanted to have her maid dress Walpurga's hair. But Walpurga would not allow it.

"No stranger's hand shall touch my head," said she. And after a little while she presented a tidy and almost cheerful appearance.

"There, now I'll go to the queen," said she. "How do you address her?"

"Your majesty,' or, 'most gracious madam.'"

"In the prayers at church they call her the 'country's mother,'" said Walpurga, "and I like that far better. That's a glorious, beautiful name. If it were mine, no one should take it from me. And now I'll go to the queen."

"No! you must wait. You will be sent for."

"That'll suit me just as well. But I want to ask a favor of you. Call me 'Du'."*

"Quite willingly, if the first lady of the bedchamber does not object."

"And so nothing can be done here without asking leave. But

now we've done enough talking, let's be quiet. Ah, yes! there's one thing more. Whose picture is that hanging up there?"

"The queen's."

"Is that the queen? O, how lovely! But she's very young."

"Yes, she's only eighteen years old."

Walpurga gazed at the picture for a long while. Then, turning away from it, she sank on her knees beside the great chair, folded her hands and softly whispered a paternoster.

Walpurga was still kneeling, when a knock at the door was heard. A lackey entered and said:

"Her majesty has sent for his royal highness's nurse."

Walpurga arose and followed the servant, Mademoiselle Kramer accompanying them.

CHAPTER X.

PRECEDED by a servant bearing a lantern, they passed through the long, narrow, brilliantly-lighted passage and, ascending a staircase, reached the gallery of the royal chapel. There were cushioned chairs for the court. Walpurga looked down into the vast, dark hall. There was no light except that in the altar lamp, the rays of which faintly illumined the image of the Virgin.

"Thou art everywhere!" said Walpurga, half aloud, while she looked down into the dark church and saluted the Madonna with the Child, as familiarly as if greeting an intimate friend. A dim sense of the divine attributes of maternity, as glorified in ages of song and picture, prayer and sacrifice, filled her soul. She nodded to the picture once again, and then walked on. As uncertain of her steps as if walking on glass, she went through the throne-room, and the great ball-room. Then they passed through other apartments which, although evidently intended for more domestic uses, were without doors and were separated from each other by heavy double hangings. At last they descended a wide marble staircase with a golden balustrade. It was well-lighted and carpeted. Here there were servants and guards. They entered other apartments, which were filled with people, who paused in their eager conversation to glance at Walpurga. In the third room, Dr. Gunther advanced towards her. Taking her by the hand, he led her up to a gentleman who was attired in a brilliant uniform and wore the crosses and medals of many orders.

"This is His Majesty, the king," said he.

"I know him; I've seen him before," replied Walpurga. "My father rowed him across the lake, and so did my Hansei, too."

"Then, as we have known each other so long, let us improve our acquaintance," replied the king. "And now go to the queen; but be careful not to agitate her."

He dismissed her with a gracious inclination of the head and, accompanied by Doctor Gunther and Countess Brinkenstein, whom they found in attendance, she passed through several other rooms, the heavy carpets of which deadened the sounds of their footsteps.

"Be careful not to agitate her." The words greatly troubled Walpurga. Why should she provoke the queen to anger? for that was the only meaning she could take from the word.

Although she did not know what they meant by the word, her being pushed hither and thither, up and down, through passages and rooms without number, encountering the glances of the courtiers by the way and, at last, receiving the king's warning, had had the effect of agitating her.

At last she stood at the threshold of a green apartment that appeared to her like an enchanted room, hollowed out of some vast emerald. A lamp with a green glass shade hung from the ceiling, and shed a soft, fairy-like light on the room and its inmates. And there on the large, canopied bed, with the glittering crown overhead, lay the queen.

Walpurga held her breath; a soft glow illumined the face of her who lay there.

"Have you come?" asked a gentle voice.

"Yes, my queen, God greet you! Just keep yourself quiet and cheerful. All has gone well with you, thank God!"

With these words, Walpurga advanced towards the bedside, and would not suffer Doctor Gunther nor Countess Brinkenstein to keep her back. She offered her hand to the queen. And thus two hands—one hardened by toil and rough as the bark of a tree, the other as soft as the petal of a lily—clasped each other.

"I thank you for having come. Were you glad to do so?"

"I was glad to come, but sorry to leave home."

"You surely love your child and your husband with all your heart."

"I'm my husband's wife, and my child's mother."

"And your mother nurses your child and cares for it with a loving heart?" inquired the queen.

"The idea!" replied Walpurga.

The queen did not seem to know that her answer meant: "That's a matter of course," and she therefore asked: "Do you understand me?"

"Yes, indeed; I understand German," replied Walpurga. "But Your Majesty should n't speak so much. God willing, we'll be together in happiness for many days to come. We'll arrange everything when we can look into each other's eyes in broad daylight, and I'll do all I can to please you and the child. I've got over my homesickness and now I must do my duty. I'll be a good nurse to your child; do n't let that worry you. And now, good night! Sleep well, and let nothing trouble you. And now let me see our child."

"Breath of my breath, it lies here, sleeping by my side. How infinite is God's grace, how marvelous are his works!"

Walpurga felt that some one was pulling at her dress, and hastily said:

"Good night, dear queen. Put all idle thoughts away from you. This is no time to busy yourself thinking. We'll have enough to think of when the time comes. Good night!"

"No, remain here! You must stay!" begged the queen.

"I must beg Your Majesty—" hurriedly interposed Doctor Gunther.

"Do leave her with me a little while," begged the queen, in childlike tones. "I am sure it will do me no harm to talk with her. When she drew near the bed, and I heard her voice, I felt as if a breath of Alpine air, in all its dewy freshness, was being wafted towards me. Even now I feel as if lying on a high mountain, from which I can look down into the beautiful world."

"Your Majesty, such excitement may prove quite injurious."

"Very well; I will be calm. But do leave her with me a moment longer! Let me have more light, so that I may see her."

The screen was removed from a lamp that stood on a side-table, and the two mothers beheld each other, face to face.

"How beautiful you are," exclaimed the queen.

"That does not matter any longer," replied Walpurga. "God be praised, we've both got over having our heads turned by such nonsense. You're a wife and mother, and so am I."

The screen fell again; the queen, taking Walpurga's hand in hers, said in a gentle voice:

"Bend down to me, I want to kiss you—I must kiss you."

Walpurga did as she was bid, and the queen kissed her.

"You can go now. Keep yourself good and true," said the queen.

A tear of Walpurga's fell upon the face of the queen, who added:

"Do not weep! You, too, are a mother."

Unable to utter another word, Walpurga turned to go, and the queen called after her.

"What is your name?"

"Walpurga" said Doctor Gunther, answering for her.

"And can you sing well?" asked the queen.

"They say so," replied Walpurga.

"Then sing often to my child, or 'our child,' as you call him. Good night!"

Doctor Gunther remained with the queen. It was some time before he uttered a word. He felt that he must calm her excited feelings, and he had a safe and simple remedy at command.

"I must request Your Majesty," said he, "to return my congratulations. My daughter Cornelia, the wife of Professor Korn

of the university, was safely delivered of a little girl, at the very hour in which the crown prince was born."

"I congratulate the child on having such a grandfather. You shall, also, be the grandfather of our son."

"The congratulation that imposes a noble duty upon its recipient, is the best that can be given," replied Gunther. "I thank you. But we must now cease talking. Permit me to bid Your Majesty good night!"

Gunther left the room. All was silent.

Instead of taking Walpurga back to the upper rooms, they had conducted her to a well-furnished apartment on the other side of the palace, where, to her great delight, she found Mademoiselle Kramer awaiting her.

"The queen kissed me!" exclaimed she. "O what an angel she is! I'd no idea there were such creatures in the world."

Sometime later, when the queen had fallen asleep, two women brought a gilded cradle into Walpurga's room.

When they took the child from the bed, the queen, as if conscious of what was being done, moved in her sleep.

Before taking the child to her bosom, Walpurga breathed upon it thrice. It opened its eyes and looked at her, and then quickly closed them again.

Throughout the palace, all was soon hushed in silence. Walpurga and the child by her side were asleep. Mademoiselle Kramer sat up during the night, and, in the ante-chamber on either side, there were doctors and servants within call.

CHAPTER XI.

IN the village by the lake, or, to speak more correctly, in the few houses clustered near the Chamois inn, Walpurga's strange and sudden departure caused great commotion.

All hurried towards the inn. The innkeeper assumed a wise air and desired it to be understood that he knew far more than people gave him credit for. The whole affair was, of course, of his planning; for had it not been proven that his acquaintance included even the king himself?

Immediately after Walpurga's departure, he urged Hansei to accompany him to the Chamois, for he well knew that his presence there would prove a far greater attraction than a band of musicians.

Hansei would not go at once, but promised to follow soon afterward. He could not leave home just then.

He went through the whole house, from cellar to garret. Then he went out into the stable, where, for a long while, he watched the cow feeding. "Such a beast has a good time of it, after all," thought he; "others have to provide for it, and wherever it finds a full crib, it is at home."

He went into the room and, silently nodding to the grandmother, cast a hurried glance at the slumbering child. He seated himself near the table and, resting his elbows thereon, buried his face in his hands.

"It still goes," said he, looking up at the Black Forest clock that was ticking on the wall. "She wound it up before she left."

He went out and sat down on the bench under the cherry tree. The starlings overhead were quite merry, and from the woods a cuckoo called: "Yes, he goes away, too, and leaves his children to be brought up by strangers."

Hansei laughed to himself, and looked about him. Had the wife really gone? She must still be sitting there! How could those who belong together be thus parted?

He kept staring at the seat next to him—but she was not there. Half the village had gathered before the garden gate. Young and old, big and little, stood there, gazing at him.

Wastl (Sebastian), the weaver, who had for many years been a comrade of Hansei's, and had worked with him in the forest, called out:

"God greet you, Hansei! Your bread has fallen with the buttered side up."

Hansei muttered sullen thanks. Suddenly, there was a great peal of laughter. No one knew who had been the first to utter the word "he-nurse." It had been rapidly and quietly passed from one to another through the crowd, until it at last reached Thomas, Zenza's son—a bold, rawboned fellow, whose open shirt revealed a brawny chest.

"Walpurga's the crown prince's *she*-nurse, and Hansei's the *he*-nurse."

Wastl opened the gate and entered the garden, the whole crowd following at his heels. They went through garden, house and stable; peeped through the windows, smelled at the violets on the window-shelf, and sat down on the kindling wood that lay under the shed. The house seemed to have become the property of the whole village. When joy or sorrow enters a home, all doors are open, and the rooms and passages become as a public highway.

"What do they all want?" inquired Hansei of Wastl, who had sat down beside him on the bench.

"Nothing! All they've come for is to see for themselves that the whole thing's true, so they can tell others about it. But they're all pleased with your good luck."

"My good luck! Well, I suppose it had to be," said Hansei, in a tone scarcely suggestive of happiness. "Wastl, it seems as if nothing is to go right with me. I'd just begun to think that everything would go on smoothly as it had been doing, and now, all at once, I've got to climb another mountain. But you're single and, of course, you can't know how I feel."

"It's very good of you to be so fond of your wife."

"My wife? So fond?"

"I know how you must feel."

Hansei shook his head with an incredulous air.

"Cheer up!" said Wastl. "Many a husband would be glad to be rid of his wife for a year."

"For a year?"

"The longer the better, some would say," thought Wastl. "But your wife will come back again and turn your cottage into a palace, and then you'll be king number two!"

Hansei laughed loudly, although he was not in a laughing mood. He felt as if he must go out into the forest, where he should neither hear nor see anything of the world. Confound it all! Why did the wife leave? Was it for this that we married and pledged ourselves to be one for life, come weal come woe?

But Hansei could not get away. Half the village had gathered about him. All spoke of his good-fortune. The owner of the great farm up the road, he who was known as the Leithofbauer, even stopped his team at the garden gate and alighted in order to shake hands with Hansei and wish him joy.

"If you'd like to buy the meadow next to your garden, I'll sell it to you. It's a little too far off for me," said the Leithofbauer.

The joiner who lived in the village, and who had long been anxious to emigrate, quickly said:

"You'll do far better if you buy my house and farm. I'll let you have them dirt cheap."

The starlings up in the tree could not out-chatter these people. Hansei laughed heartily. Why, this is splendid! thought he. The whole world comes to offer me house and farm, field and meadow.

"You were right, Walpurga!" said he suddenly. The people stared, first at him and then at each other, and did not know what to make of him.

He stretched his limbs, as if awaking from sleep, and said:

"Many thanks, dear neighbors. If I can ever repay you, in joy or in sorrow, I'll surely do so. But now, I'll make no change; no, I shan't move a nail in the house till my wife comes back."

"Spoken like a man, good and true," said the Leithofbauer, and greater praise could befall no one, than to be thus spoken of by the wealthiest farmer in the neighborhood.

"Would you like to look at my cow?" said Hansei, beckoning to the Leithofbauer, who now seemed the only one on a level with himself.

The Leithofbauer thanked him, but had no time to stop. Before taking his leave, he assured Hansei that he would willingly advise him how to put out his money safely.

His money? Where could it be? Hansei trembled with fear

and pressed his hands to his head—he had lost the roll of money! Where was it? He plunged his hand into his pocket. The roll was still there! And now that his hand again clutched it, he was quite affable to those who still remained, and had a kind word for every one.

At last, the villagers had all left, and Hansei could think of nothing better to do than to climb up into his cherry tree—the true friend that would never desert him, and would give as long as it had aught to give.

He plucked and ate lots of cherries, while he looked at the telegraph wire and thought: It runs into the palace and I could talk to my wife through it, if I only knew how. He bent forward until he could touch the wire, and having done so, quickly withdrew his hand, as if frightened.

Suddenly he heard a voice calling to him:

"Hansei! where are you?"

"Here I am."

"Come along!" was the answer. It was the priest who had called to him.

Hansei hurried down from the tree and now received the greatest honor that had yet been paid him. The priest beckoned to him, and Hansei approached, hat in hand.

"I wish you joy!" said the priest. "Come along to the inn; the host of the Chamois has opened a fresh tap."

Hansei looked at himself to see what had come over him. To think of the priest's inviting him to walk with him, and to drink in his company, too!

He received the new honor with dignity. While he walked with the priest, the people whom they met along the road would lift their hats and he would acknowledge their greetings quite affably.

In the large room at the Chamois, where every one was either talking to or of him, he felt so happy that he opened the roll of money, without, however, removing it from his pocket. He meant to offer the first piece to the priest, so that he might say a mass for Walpurga. But the pieces were so large. They were all crown thalers. And so Hansei merely said:

"I wish you'd say a mass for my wife and child. I'll pay you."

It was already twilight. The guests gradually departed. But Hansei remained sitting there, as if rooted to the spot. At last, he and the innkeeper were the only ones in the room.

"Now that they've all had a talk at you," said the innkeeper, "you may as well listen to me. No one means it as kindly with you as I do, and I'm not a fool, either. Do you know what would suit you, Hansei, and would suit your wife still better?"

"What?"

"This is the place for you,—you and your wife! I've been landlord long enough. When your wife comes back, you can say

'good night' to your cottage and settle yourselves here, where you'll find a good living for your children and your grandchildren. We won't talk about it now; but don't commit yourself to anything else. I'm your best friend; I think I've proved that, this very day. I do n't care to make a penny by the affair—quite the contrary."

O how kind they are when all goes well with one!

Hansei sat there for a long while, looking into his glass, and endeavoring to satisfy himself as to who he really was. Then he began to think of his wife again: where she might be, and how it was with her. If he could only go to sleep that very moment and remain asleep until the year was out; but to sit and wait. . . . He looked up at the clock; it was just striking ten.

"How often you'll have to strike ten before we meet again," thought he to himself.

Hansei almost staggered as he walked through the village. The people who were sitting at their doors, or standing about, saluted him and wished him joy, and he well knew that, far away among the mountains, all were speaking of his good luck. He felt as if he must cut himself into a thousand pieces in order to thank them all.

He was standing near his garden and looking at the hedge. How long was it since he, who had never before known a spot which he could call his home, had prized himself as ever so happy in the possession of a little property! And now the grandmother was sitting in the house, and he heard her singing his child to sleep:

"If all the streams were naught but wine,
And all the hills were gems so fine,
And all were mine:
Yet would my darling treasure be
Dearer far than all to me.

"And since we needs must part,
One more kiss before I start.
Thou remain'st, but I must leave,
And parting sore the heart doth grieve;
But, though life drags, we'll not despond,
For longer far is the life beyond."

"But though life drags, we'll not despond, For longer far is the life beyond." The words sank deep into Hansei's heart, and the fireflies flitting about in the darkness, or resting on fence and grass, drew his glance hither and thither, as if they were some new and startling phenomenon. Hansei's waking dream continued for some time, and when he, at last, passed his hand over his face, it was wet with the dew. He felt as if some one must carry him into the house and put him to bed. But a sudden turn caused the roll of money to touch his hip, and he was wide awake again.

He walked far out along the road, in the same direction that Walpurga had gone, and at last reached the pile of stones on which she had rested a fortnight ago. There was still some hay lying there. He sat down upon it and gazed out at the broad lake, over which the moon shed its bright rays. It was just as quiet as it had been a fortnight before; but that was in the daytime, and now, it was night. "Where can my wife be now?" said he, springing to his feet, so that he might run to her, though it took the whole night. "How glad she will be to have me come to the palace the very first morning she is there!" With giant strides he hurried on. But he could not help asking himself: "How will it be if you have to leave again to-morrow, and what will the folks at home say, and what will grandmother think, left all alone with the child?"

And yet he walked on. Suddenly, he became alarmed at the thought of the money on his person. The neighborhood was safe enough, to be sure. It was long since any crime had been heard of in that region. But still there might be robbers, who, after helping themselves to his treasure, would murder him, and throw him into the lake. . . . Tortured by fear, he hurriedly turned about and ran towards home.

Advancing towards him, he beheld a figure of threatening aspect. He grasped the knife in his belt—"If there's only one, and no other's lying in wait, I'm man enough to defend myself," thought he.

The figure advanced, greeting him from afar. The voice was that of a woman. Could Walpurga have— No, that were impossible.

The figure halted. Hansei advanced towards it and said: "Oh! is it you, Esther, out on the road so late?"

"And is this you, Hansei?" said Black Esther, laughing heartily. "I thought it was some drunken fellow, because I heard you, a great way off, talking to yourself. But, of course, now you're lonely enough, I suppose."

"Do you walk in the woods so late at night, and all alone?"

"I must go alone, if no one goes with me," said Black Esther, with a laugh that fell harshly upon the silent night. There was a pause. Hansei could hear the beating of his heart. Perhaps it was caused by his rapid walking.

"I must go home," said he, at last. "Good night."

Laying her hand on his shoulder, Black Esther said: "Hansei, I'm not used to begging and, if it were day, I'd rather starve than ask you for anything. But now, you've a good heart and are doing well; give me something, or lend it to me. I'll give it back to you again." She spoke so persuasively that Hansei trembled. Her hand still rested upon him; he was about to feel in his pocket for the crown thaler he had saved from the priest,

when he suddenly pushed her hand from his shoulder, and said: "I'll give you something another time." He then ran off towards home. Her shrill laughter rang in his ears, and it sounded as if hundreds of voices were answering from the rocks. His hair stood on end and he felt, by turns, as if shivering with cold and burning with fever. She must surely have been one of the forest demons, who had merely assumed the form of Black Esther. And there really were such beings, for the old forest inspector had, on his deathbed, confessed to having seen one. They wander about when the moon is at its full. Instead of wearing clothes, they merely wind their long hair about their bodies, and on such a night as this, when the mother is away from her child, they can—

Hansei had never before run so fast, or found the road by the lake so long, as on this very night.

He reached home at last and, as if to assure himself that the house was still there, touched the walls with his hands. Nothing had been disturbed. All was as he had left it.

He went indoors. The light in the room was still burning. The grandmother was sitting on a low stool, and had the child on her lap. With one hand, she hid her eyes—they were red with weeping; with the other, she motioned Hansei to step lightly.

Hansei did not observe that there had been, and still was, something wrong with his mother-in-law. He had taken a seat behind the table, was thinking of no one but himself, and felt as tired and ill at ease as if he had just returned from a long and dangerous journey. He was even obliged to remind himself that, although he was at home, it was no longer the right sort of a home. The grandmother placed the child in the cradle and sat down, resting her chin upon her closed hand. Thoughts far different from Hansei's had passed through her mind. Stasi had remained with the grandmother for some time after Hansei left the house. How it would fare with Walpurga, was a topic of but short duration with them; for what could they say, or know, about that? When it began to grow dark, Stasi spoke of going, and promised to come again the next day. The grandmother nodded assent. She preferred being alone, for then there would be nothing to prevent her thinking of her child. Her prayers followed Walpurga; but the words flowed forth so easily that her mind was elsewhere much of the time. Her first thought was: Walpurga must be saying the same prayer and, although every word lengthens the distance between us, we are together in spirit, nevertheless. She felt happy that Walpurga had turned out so well in all things, and that she could be depended upon. It was hard to be among strangers; but they were men and women, after all. At times, her heart would misgive her, lest Walpurga should not be able to hold out to the end. She has lots of good notions—if she only thinks of them at the right time. "For my sake, if for nothing else, you'll

keep yourself pure," said she aloud, as she ended her prayer. All at once, she felt so lonely and forlorn. She had never passed a night without Walpurga, and, looking up at the stars, she wished it were day again. Hansei might just as well have remained at home; still, it was a great honor to be invited by the priest. He'll surely send home a schoppen of wine to gladden grandmother's heart; and if it be only half a schoppen, it'll show his good heart. Her tongue seemed as if parched; she thirsted for the wine, and listened for a long while, in the vain hope that she might hear the footsteps of the innkeeper's servant, bringing the bottle under her apron. At last, pity for herself made her indescribably miserable, and she burst into tears. O that her husband were still alive! A poor widow woman is always expected to be at hand, but no one thinks of how it fares with her. Tears came to her relief; for, after a little while, she said to herself: "What an awful sinner you are! Is n't it enough to have clothes and food and a home, and never to hear a harsh word? You ought to be thankful that you're still active enough to be of use to others."

As if ashamed of herself, she turned away, wiped the tears from her furrowed face, and then sang cheerful songs to the child. Then she waited silently, until Hansei, at last, returned. And thus he found her, seated beside the cradle and resting her chin upon her clenched hand.

"Where have you been so long?" asked the grandmother, in a low voice.

"I hardly know, myself."

"Walpurga must be in bed by this time."

"Very likely; they can travel fast, four-in-hand."

"Do you hear the cow lowing? The poor beast is n't used to be alone and, this very evening, the butcher drove her calf by the stable. It's awful to hear her moan. Do go and look after her."

Hansei went out to the stable, and the cow became perfectly quiet. He walked away, and she began lowing again. He returned and spoke to her kindly. As long as he talked to her and kept his hand upon her back, she was quiet; but as soon as he left her, she would low more piteously than before. In despair, he was constantly going back and forth, between the room and the stable. He returned several times, gave her some fodder, and then sat down on a bundle of hay. At last the cow lay down and slept, and Hansei, overcome with fatigue, also fell asleep. Indeed, few had ever gone through so much in one day as our poor Hansei had.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Walpurga awoke next morning, she fancied herself at home, and looked at the strange surroundings as if it were all a dream that would not vanish at her bidding. She gradually realized what had happened. Closing her eyes again, she said her prayers and then boldly looked about her; the same sun that shone on the cottage by the lake, shone on the palace, too.

Full of fresh courage, she arose.

She lay at the window for a long while, looking at the scene so strange to her.

She saw nothing of the bustling city. The palace square, encircled by thick, bushy orange trees, was far removed from the noise of the streets. At the palace gate, two soldiers, with their muskets at rest, were seen marching up and down.

But Walpurga's thoughts wandered homeward. In her mind's eye, she saw the cottage by the lake and all within its walls. In fancy, she heard the crackling of the wood with which her mother kindled the fire, and saw the lamp which she took from the kitchen-shelf. We have milk in the house, for we've got a cow. Mother will be glad to go milking again. I'm sure they never light a fire at home without thinking of me. And the chattering starlings, up in the cherry tree, are saying:

"Our goodwife is gone; a cow has taken her place."

Walpurga smiled and went on thinking to herself: My Hansei's over-sleeping himself this morning. If you did n't call him, he'd sleep till noon; he never wakes of himself. She hears her mother calling: "Get up, Hansei; the sun is burning a hole in your bed!" He gets up and washes his face at the pump, and now she sees them at their meal; the child is fed with good milk. If I'd only taken a good look at the cow! And now Hansei is getting fodder for it from the innkeeper. If he only does n't let the rogue cheat him; and Hansei will feel more forlorn than the child; but, thank God, he has work enough to keep him busy. It's fishing time, and so he does n't go into the woods. I see him jump into his boat; what a noise he makes! The oars are plashing, and away he rows to catch what fish he can.

Walpurga would have gone on picturing to herself her home at noon and at evening. Suddenly, she felt as if she had lost her reason. Absence and death are almost one and the same. You can have no idea of how it will be one hour after your death; you cannot imagine yourself out of the world. Her head swam and, as if startled by an apparition, she turned to Mademoiselle Kramer, and said:

"Let's talk!"

Mademoiselle Kramer required no second hint, and told Walpurga that every one in the palace knew of the queen's having

kissed her the night before, and that it would be in all the newspapers of the next day.

"Pshaw!" said Walpurga; whereupon Mademoiselle Kramer declared that, although it made no difference in her case, it was highly improper to answer in that way, and told her, also, that she ought always express herself distinctly and in a respectful manner.

Walpurga looked up and listened, as if waiting for Mademoiselle Kramer to continue and, at last, said: "My dear father once said almost the very same thing to me; but I was too young to understand it then. All I meant to say was, that the city people must have very little to do, if they can make a fuss about such a matter"—mentally concluding her remarks with another "pshaw!"

The little prince awoke. Walpurga took him up and speedily put him to sleep, while she sang in a clear voice:

Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me.

When she had finished her song, and had placed the child in the cradle, she looked toward the door and beheld the king and Doctor Gunther standing there.

"You sing finely," said the king.

"Pshaw!" said Walpurga; and, acting as her own interpreter, she quickly added, while casting a hurried glance at Mademoiselle Kramer: "It's good enough for home use, but not particularly fine."

The king and Doctor Gunther were delighted with the appearance of the child.

"The day on which one beholds his child for the first time is a red-letter day," observed the king; and Walpurga, as if to confirm what he had said, added:

"Yes, indeed; that makes one look at the world with different eyes. His majesty told the truth that time."

Although her remark caused the king to smile, it was received in silence. Accompanied by Doctor Gunther, he soon left the room. After they had gone, Mademoiselle Kramer endeavored, as delicately as possible, to impress Walpurga with the importance of observing the first commandment:

"You must not speak to their majesties, unless they ask you a question."

"That's sensible," exclaimed Walpurga, to the great surprise of Mademoiselle Kramer. "That prevents you from hearing anything out of the way. What a clever idea! I won't forget that."

During breakfast, in the pavilion, it was plainly to be seen that Mademoiselle Kramer, and perhaps Walpurga, too, had spoken

truly. The various groups on the verandah and under the orange trees were engaged in what seemed to be confidential conversation. After they had sounded each other, and had satisfied themselves that they could safely indulge in scandal, the common topic was the manner in which the queen's sentimentality had manifested itself in her behavior toward the nurse. It was agreed that this mawkishness was an unfortunate legacy from the house of ——. Some even went so far as to say that Countess Brinkenstein was quite ill with anger at the queen's disregard of etiquette.

"The queen's conduct deprives her favors of their value," said an elderly court lady, who must have had at least a pound and a half of false hair on her head.

"Nothing is so great a bore as mawkish sensibility," observed another one of the ladies attached to the palace. She was corpulent, and piously inclined withal. As if to cover her ill-natured remark with the mantle of charity, she added:

"The queen is n't much more than a child, and really means well at heart."

She had thus made herself safe with both parties—those who praised, and those who abused the queen.

"You look as if you had slept but little," said an elderly lady, addressing a very young and pale-looking one.

"You are right," sighed the latter, in reply. "I sat up to read the last volume of ——" giving the name of a recent unequivocal French novel—"and finished it at a single sitting. I shall return the book to you to-day. It is very interesting."

"Please let me have it next," resounded from several quarters at once.

The pious lady, who had, indeed, read the novel in secret and was loth to talk of such subjects, changed the conversation by introducing the topic of Walpurga. As the latest piece of news, she acquainted them with the report that the nurse could sing beautifully.

"Who sings beautifully?" inquired Countess Irma, joining the group.

"This will interest you, dear Wildenort. You will be able to learn many new songs from Walpurga, and accompany them on the zither."

"I'll wait until we are in the country again. A peasant woman seems strangely out of place in a palace. When does the court return to the country?"

"Not for six weeks."

There was much talk about Walpurga. One lady maintained that Doctor Gunther was a native of the Highlands, and that it was only through his intriguing that a nurse had to be brought from the same region; that he was constantly surrounding himself with allies, and was clever enough to know that this person would

exert a great influence upon the queen. They also spoke of the Doctor's love of intrigue, and of his affecting to sympathize with the queen in all her extravagant fancies. Of one thing they all felt assured: that it was impossible to retain the favor of the court for so long a time, by fair means alone.

"The Doctor is n't so very old," remarked a very thin lady. "He is only a little over fifty. I think he must have dyed his hair white, in order to appear venerable before his time."

Loud laughter greeted this sally.

Before breakfast, the ladies and gentlemen were in separate groups. A knot of courtiers were discussing the telegrams which had been sent out to various governments, and to which in some instances, replies had already been received.

It was not until after breakfast that a council of the royal household was to determine who, besides the queen's parents, should be invited to stand as sponsors. It was even reported that the christening would be celebrated by a special papal nuncio, assisted by the bishop.

Countess Irma's brother, the king's aid-de-camp, again diverted the conversation from such lofty topics back to Walpurga. He extolled her beauty and her droll ways, and they smacked their lips, when they spoke of the queen's kiss. The aid-de-camp had given vent to a joke on the subject, at which they laughed uproariously.

"The king!" suddenly whispered several of the gentlemen.

They separated and, while making their obeisance, arranged themselves in two rows. The king, acknowledging their salutation, passed between the rows and entered the hall of Diana, where breakfast was served. The frescoes on the ceiling represented the goddess with her hunting train, and had been painted by a pupil of Rubens. The lord steward handed a packet of telegrams to the king, who instructed him to open them, and inform him when they contained anything more than congratulations.

They now sat down to breakfast.

The company was not so cheerful and unconstrained as it had been at the summer palace. Indeed, no one had yet recovered from the excitement of the previous night, and conversation was carried on in a quiet tone.

"Countess Irma," said the king, "I commend Walpurga to you; she will be sure to please you. You will be able to learn some beautiful songs from her, and to teach her new ones."

"Thanks, Your Majesty! If Your Majesty would only deign to order the first lady of the bedchamber to grant me access, at all times, to the apartments of his royal highness the crown prince."

"Pray see to it, dear Rittersfeld!" said the king, turning to the lord steward.

Countess Irma, who sat at the lower end of the table, received the congratulations of all. Walpurga had become the sole topic of conversation.

The morning papers were brought to the king. He glanced through them hurriedly and, throwing them aside with an angry air, said :

"This babbling press ! The queen's kiss is already in all the newspapers." His face darkened ; it was evident that, as the fact itself had displeased him, the publicity given it was doubly annoying. After a time, he said :

"I desire you, gentlemen and ladies, to see to it that the queen does not hear of this." He rose quickly and left the apartment.

The breakfast party lingered for some time, and the pious lady could now openly join the ranks of the scandal-mongers. The mantle of charity was no longer necessary—it was very evident that the king had already tired of his sentimental wife.

If Countess Irma—? Who could tell but what this was part of a deep-laid plan to give her free access to the crown prince's apartments? The king could meet her there—and who knows but that—

They were quite ingenious in the malicious conjectures which they whispered to each other with great caution and circumspection. For a while, at least, Walpurga, the queen and even the crown prince were completely forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII.

"**T**HERE, my boy ! Now you've seen the sun. May you see it for seven and seventy years to come, and when they've run their course, may the Lord grant you a new lease of life. Last night, they lit millions of lamps for your sake. But they were nothing to the sun up in heaven, which the Lord himself lighted for you this very morning. Be a good boy, always, so that you may deserve to have the sun shine on you. Yes, now the angel's whispering to you. Laugh while you sleep ! That's right. There's one angel belongs to you on earth, and that's your mother ! And you're mine, too ! You're mine, indeed !"

Thus spake Walpurga, her voice soft, yet full of emotion, while she gazed into the face of the child that lay on her lap. Her soul was already swayed by that mysterious bond of affection which never fails to develop itself in the heart of the foster-mother. It is a noble trait in human nature, that we love those on whom we can confer a kindness. Their whole life gradually becomes interwoven with our own.

Walpurga became oblivious of herself and of all that was dear to her in the cottage by the lake. She was now needed here, where a young life had been assigned to her loving charge.

She looked up at Mademoiselle Kramer, with beaming eyes, and met a joyful glance in return.

"It seems to me," said Walpurga, "that a palace is just like a church. One has only good and pious thoughts here; and all the people are so kind and frank."

Mademoiselle Kramer suddenly smiled and replied:

"My dear child—"

"Do n't call me 'child'! I'm not a child! I'm a mother!"

"But here, in the great world, you are only a child. A court is a strange place. Some go hunting, others go fishing; one builds, another paints; one studies a *rôle*, another a piece of music; a dancer learns a new step, an author writes a new book. Every one in the land is doing something,—cooking or baking, drilling or practicing, writing, painting, or dancing—simply in order that the king and queen may be entertained."

"I understand you," said Walpurga, and Mademoiselle Kramer continued:

"My family has been in the service of the court for sixteen generations;"—six would have been the right number, but sixteen sounded so much better;—"my father is the governor of the summer palace, and I was born there. I know all about the court, and can teach you a great deal."

"And I'll be glad to learn," interposed Walpurga.

"Do you imagine that every one is kindly disposed towards you? Take my word for it, a palace contains people of all sorts, good and bad. All the vices abound in such a place. And there are many other matters of which you have no idea and of which you will, I trust, ever remain ignorant. But all you meet are wondrous polite. Try to remain just as you now are and, when you leave the palace, let it be as the same Walpurga you were when you came here."

Walpurga stared at her, in surprise. Who could change her?

Word came that the queen was awake and desired Walpurga to bring the crown prince to her.

Accompanied by Doctor Gunther, Mademoiselle Kramer and two waiting-women, she proceeded to the queen's bedchamber. The queen lay there, calm and beautiful, and, with a smile of greeting, turned her face towards those who had entered. The curtains had been partially drawn aside and a broad, slanting ray of light shone into the apartment, which seemed still more peaceful than during the breathless silence of the previous night.

"Good morning!" said the queen, with a voice full of feeling. "Let me have my child!" She looked down at the babe that rested in her arms and then, without noticing any one in the room, lifted her glance on high and faintly murmured:

"This is the first time I behold my child in the daylight!"

All were silent; it seemed as if there was naught in the apart-

ment except the broad slanting ray of light that streamed in at the window.

"Have you slept well?" enquired the queen. Walpurga was glad that the queen had asked a question, for now she could answer. Casting a hurried glance at Mademoiselle Kramer, she said:

"Yes, indeed! Sleep's the first, the last, and the best thing in the world."

"She's clever," said the queen, addressing Doctor Gunther in French.

Walpurga's heart sank within her. Whenever she heard them speak French, she felt as if they were betraying her; as if they had put on an invisible cap, like that worn by the goblins in the fairy-tale, and could thus speak without being seen.

"Did the prince sleep well?" asked the queen.

Walpurga passed her hand over her face, as if to brush away a spider that had been creeping there. The queen does n't speak of her "child" or her "son," but only of "the crown prince."

Walpurga answered:

"Yes, quite well, thank God! That is, I could n't hear him, and I only wanted to say that I'd like to act toward the—" she could not say "the princce"—"that is, towards him, as I'd do with my own child. We began right on the very first day. My mother taught me that. Such a child has a will of its own from the very start, and it won't do to give way to it. It won't do to take it from the cradle, or to feed it, whenever it pleases; there ought to be regular times for all those things. It'll soon get used to that, and it won't harm it either, to let it cry once in a while. On the contrary, that expands the chest."

"Does he cry?" asked the queen.

The infant answered the question for itself, for it at once began to cry most lustily.

"Take him and quiet him," begged the queen.

The king entered the apartment before the child had stopped crying.

"He will have a good voice of command," said he, kissing the queen's hand.

Walpurga quieted the child, and she and Mademoiselle Kramer were sent back to their apartments.

The king informed the queen of the dispatches that had been received, and of the sponsors who had been decided upon. She was perfectly satisfied with all the arrangements that had been made.

When Walpurga had returned to her room and had placed the child in the cradle, she walked up and down and seemed quite agitated.

"There are no angels in this world!" said she. "They're all

just like the rest of us, and who knows but—" She was vexed at the queen: "Why won't she listen patiently when her child cries? We must take all our children bring us, whether it be joy or pain."

She stepped out into the passage-way and heard the tones of the organ in the palace chapel. For the first time in her life, these sounds displeased her. It don't belong in the house, thought she, where all sorts of things are going on. The church ought to stand by itself.

When she returned to the room, she found a stranger there. Mademoiselle Kramer informed her that this was the tailor to the queen.

Walpurga laughed outright at the notion of a "tailor to the queen." The elegantly attired person looked at her in amazement, while Mademoiselle Kramer explained to her that this was the dressmaker to her majesty the queen, and that he had come to take her measure for three new dresses.

"Am I to wear city clothes?"

"God forbid! You're to wear the dress of your neighborhood, and can order a stomacher in red, blue, green, or any color that you like best."

"I hardly know what to say; but I'd like to have a workday suit, too. Sunday clothes on week days—that won't do."

"At court, one always wears Sunday clothes, and when her majesty drives out again you will have to accompany her."

"All right, then. I won't object."

While the tailor took her measure, Walpurga laughed incessantly, and he was at last obliged to ask her to hold still, so that he might go on with his work. Putting his measure into his pocket, he informed Mademoiselle Kramer that he had ordered an exact model, and that the chief master of ceremonies had favored him with several drawings, so that there might be no doubt of success.

Finally, he asked permission to see the crown prince. Mademoiselle Kramer was about to let him do so, but Walpurga objected. "Before the child is christened," said she, "no one shall look at it just out of curiosity, and least of all, a tailor, or else the child will never turn out the right sort of man."

The tailor took his leave, Mademoiselle Kramer having politely hinted to him that nothing could be done with the superstition of the lower orders, and that it would not do to irritate the nurse.

This occurrence induced Walpurga to administer the first serious reprimand to Mademoiselle Kramer. She could not understand why she was so willing to make an exhibition of the child. "Nothing does a child more harm than to let strangers look at it in its sleep, and a tailor at that."

All the wild fun with which, in popular songs, tailors are held up to scorn and ridicule, found vent in Walpurga, and she began singing:

Just list, ye braves, who love to roam!
A snail was chasing a tailor home.
And if Old Shears had n't run so fast,
The snail would surely have caught him at last.

Mademoiselle Kramer's acquaintance with the court tailor had lowered her in Walpurga's esteem, and with an evident effort to mollify the latter, she asked:

"Does the idea of your new and beautiful clothes really afford you no pleasure?"

"To be frank with you, no! I do n't wear them for my own sake, but for that of others, who dress me to please themselves. It's all the same to me, however! I've given myself up to them, and suppose I must submit."

"May I come in?" asked a pleasant voice. Countess Irma entered the room. Extending both her hands to Walpurga, she said:

"God greet you, my countrywoman! I am also from the Highlands, seven hours distance from your village. I know it well, and once sailed over the lake with your father. Does he still live?"

"Alas! no; he was drowned, and the lake has n't given up its dead."

"He was a fine-looking old man, and you are the very image of him."

"I am glad to find some one else here who knew my father. The court tailor—I mean the court doctor—knew him, too. Yes, search the land through, you could n't have found a better man than my father, and no one can help but admit it."

"Yes: I've often heard as much."

"May I ask your ladyship's name?"

"Countess Wildenort."

"Wildenort? I've heard the name before. Yes, I remember my mother's mentioning it. Your father was known as a very kind and benevolent man. Has he been dead a long while?"

"No, he is still living."

"Is he here, too?"

"No."

"And as what are you here, Countess?"

"As maid of honor."

"And what is that?"

"Being attached to the queen's person; or what, in your part of the country, would be called a companion!"

"Indeed! And is your father willing to let them use you that way?"

Countess Irma, who was somewhat annoyed by her questions, said:

"I wished to ask you something—can you write?"

"I once could, but I've quite forgotten how."

"Then I've just hit it! that's the very reason for my coming here. Now, whenever you wish to write home, you can dictate your letter to me, and I will write whatever you tell me to."

"I could have done that, too," suggested Mademoiselle Kramer, timidly; "and your ladyship would not have needed to trouble yourself."

"No, the Countess will write for me. Shall it be now?"

"Certainly."

But Walpurga had to go to the child. While she was in the next room, Countess Irma and Mademoiselle Kramer engaged each other in conversation.

When Walpurga returned, she found Irma, pen in hand, and at once began to dictate.

"Dear husband, dear mother, and dear child. No, stop! do n't write that! Take another sheet of paper. Now I've got it, now you can go on."

"I wish to let you know, that by the help of God, I arrived here safe and sound, in the carriage with the four horses. I do n't know how. And the queen's an angel, and there were millions of lights, and my child—"

Walpurga covered her face with both hands—she had said "my child," without knowing which child she meant.

A pause ensued.

"And my child," said Countess Irma, repeating the words after her.

"No!" exclaimed Walpurga, "I can't write to-day. Excuse me; there's no use trying. But you've promised to write for me to-morrow or the day after. Do come and see us every day."

"And shall I bring a good friend with me?"

"Of course; any friend of yours will be welcome. Is n't it so, Mademoiselle Kramer?"

"Certainly; Countess Irma has special permission."

"I'll bring a very good friend with me; she can sing charmingly, and her voice is soft and gentle—but I'll not torment you with riddles; I play the zither, and will bring mine with me."

"You play the zither?" exclaimed Walpurga, scarcely able to contain herself for joy.

Any further expressions on her part were prevented by the presence of the king, who entered at that moment.

With a gentle inclination of the head, he greeted Countess Irma, who had risen from her seat and bowed so low that it seemed as though she meant to sit down on the floor.

"What are you writing?" asked the king.

"Walpurga's secrets, may it please Your Majesty," replied Countess Irma.

"The king may read all that's there," said Walpurga, handing him the sheet.

He hurriedly ran his eye over it, and then, with a glance at the Countess, folded it and put it in his breast pocket.

"I shall sing with Walpurga," said Irma, "and Your Majesty will again observe that music is the highest good on earth. Singing together, Walpurga and I are equals. The creations of other arts, poetry especially, may be translated by every one into his own language, according to the measure of his knowledge and experience."

"Quite true," replied the king; "music is the universal language, the only one that requires no translation, and in which soul speaks to soul."

While they were thus talking, Walpurga stared at them in dumb amazement.

The king, accompanied by Countess Irma, looked at the prince for a little while, and then, having said: "The christening will take place next Sunday," he withdrew.

It was with a strange expression that Walpurga's eyes followed the king and then rested in earnest gaze upon Countess Irma.

The Countess busied herself with the papers, and then, with cheerful voice, took leave of Walpurga. Her cheerfulness almost seemed constrained, for she laughed while there was nothing to laugh at.

For a long while, Walpurga stood looking at the curtains, behind which the Countess had disappeared, and at last said to Mademoiselle Kramer:

"You told the truth, when you said that the palace is n't a church."

She did not enter into any further explanation.

"I will teach you how to write," said Mademoiselle Kramer; "it will be pleasant employment for us, and you will then be able to do your own writing to your family."

"Yes, that I will," said Walpurga.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I WANT to ask a favor of you," said Walpurga to Countess Irma, the next day. "Always tell me frankly whenever I do anything wrong."

"Quite willingly; but, in return, you must always tell me when I—"

"Then I've something on my heart, this very moment."

"Speak out."

"Sometime when we're alone together, I will."

"Pray, dear Kramer, would you oblige me by retiring for a few moments?"

Mademoiselle Kramer went into the adjoining room, and Walpurga could not help feeling astonished when she observed how, in

the palace, people were pushed hither and thither like so many chairs.

"And now, what is it?" enquired the Countess.

"You won't think ill of me, if I say anything foolish; you're sure you won't?"

"What is it?" asked Irma again.

"You're so beautiful, so very beautiful; more so than any one I've ever seen; you're even more beautiful than the queen—no, not more beautiful, but more powerful, and your eyes are full of kindness—"

"Well what is it? speak out."

"I'd rather think I'm wrong; but it's best to feel sure. Well, I did n't like the way you and the king looked at each other yesterday; while your hand was on the cradle-rail, he placed his upon it; and he's a husband and a father. You're an unmarried girl, and do n't know what it means when a man looks at you in that way; but I'm a married woman, and it's my duty to warn you. You said that we'd be good friends, and now there's a chance to test our friendship."

Irma shook her head, and replied:

"You mean well enough; but you're mistaken. The king has a noble heart and, since the birth of his son, would like to make every one as happy as he is himself. He loves his wife dearly and, as you have seen for yourself, she's an angel—"

"And if she were n't an angel, she's his wife and the mother of his child, and he must be true to her; for with every glance he gives another woman he's a confounded adulterer, whose eyes ought to be put out. Look here! If I were to think that my husband could do such a thing—but the men are wicked enough to do anything—that a man could stand by the cradle of his new-born babe, and let the same eyes with which he had just been looking at his child, tell another woman, 'I love you,'—if I were to think that, I'd go mad. And if a man whose hand has pressed that of a woman not his wife, can offer his hand to that wife, or touch his child's face with it, the world in which such things could happen ought to be burned up and the Lord ought to shower pitch and brimstone down on it."

"Speak softly, Walpurga; do n't scream so. Do n't let such words pass your lips. You are not here to look after our morals, nor is it for you to pass judgment. What do you know of the world? You've not the slightest idea of what politeness means."

Countess Irma's words were harsh and severe, and had deeply humbled Walpurga.

"Now that you know who you are and what you are about, I've something more to tell you: I forgive you for insulting the king and myself with your silly talk. If I did n't pity your ignorance, I would never speak to you again; but, as I feel kindly dis-

posed towards you, and know that you meant no harm, I shall give you a bit of advice. No matter what may happen, do n't concern yourself about it. Attend to your child, and let no one induce you to speak ill of others. Take my word for it—here, all are deceitful. They are ever ready to speak ill of one another, and unless you are very careful you 'll not have a friend in the whole palace. Mind you do n't forget what I 've said to you. And now I must thank you once more for having spoken to me as you did. You meant it all well enough, and it is proper that you should be perfectly frank. I shall always be your good friend. Although one treats the king respectfully, he is, nevertheless, as good as your Hansei, and I 'm as good as you. And now, let 's shake hands! Let bygones be bygones. Whatever you do, not a word of this to Kramer; and do n't forget that, hereabouts, the walls have ears."

Without saying another word, Countess Irma began the melody of a Highland song upon her zither.

Walpurga could hardly realize what had happened to her. She was provoked at her own stupid and forward behavior, and was firmly resolved to keep her own counsel in the future.

While Irma was playing, the king again passed through the *portiere* and stopped to listen. Irma did not look up; her eyes were fixed upon her zither. When she had finished, the king applauded faintly. She arose and bowed, but did not accompany the king when he went into the adjoining chamber to look at the prince.

"Your zither is in perfect tune, dear Countess, but you seem to be somewhat out of tune," said the king, as he came back into the room.

"I am in tune, Your Majesty," replied Countess Irma. "I 've just been playing an air to Walpurga, and it has deeply affected me."

The king left very soon afterward, and without offering his hand to the Countess.

Walpurga's saddest thought was that she dared not even trust Mademoiselle Kramer.

"O, you poor child!" said she to the prince, one day, when no one was by. "O you poor, dear child! you 're expected to grow up among people who do n't trust each other. If I could only take you with me, what a fine boy you 'd become. You 're still innocent—children, until they begin to speak, are the only innocent creatures in this world. But what matters it? I did n't make the world, and need n't change it. The Countess is right. I 'll nurse you well, care for you tenderly, and leave the rest to God."

CHAPTER XV.

"YOUR wish is fulfilled at last," said Countess Irma to Doctor Gunther, just as they were rising from the dinner-table.

"What wish?"

"I now have a female friend, a companion, and, in the words of the song, 'you'll ne'er find a better'."

"Your treatment of the peasant woman is quite amiable and does you great credit, but she is not a friend. Your friend should be one who is your equal. Your relation towards this peasant woman will always be that of a patron. She never dare find fault with you, and if she were to make the attempt, you could readily silence her. Mere common sense is defenseless against the armory of culture."

Without noticing how Irma started at these words, the Doctor calmly continued:

"There's just as much difference, mentally, between yourself and such a type of popular simplicity as there is between a grown person and a child. I fear you've neglected to secure yourself a friend who is your equal in birth."

"My equal in birth? So you, too, are an aristocrat?"

The Doctor explained that equality of rights could be conceded without doing away with social distinctions.

"Whenever I leave you," said Irma, her face radiant with enthusiasm—"whenever I've been under the influence of your thoughts, all that I do or attempt seems petty and trifling. At such moments, I feel just as I do after listening to glorious music, and long to accomplish something out of the usual way. I wish I were gifted with artistic talent."

"Content yourself with being one of nature's loveliest works. That's the best thing to do."

The Doctor was called away.

Irma remained seated for some time, and at last repaired to her room, where she amused herself with her parrot. Then, after looking at her flowers for awhile, she began to copy them in colors on a slab of marble. She evidently intended it to be a rare work. But for whom? She knew not. A tear fell on a rose, the color in which was still wet. She looked up and left her work. Then she dried the tear, and found herself obliged to paint the rose anew.

On the day before the christening, Walpurga dictated the following letter to Countess Irma:

"To-morrow will be Sunday, and I'll try to be with you, too. In thought, I'm always there. It seems as if it were seven years since I left home. The day's ever so long here, and there are more than three times as many people in the palace as could get into our church. There are lots of married servants here who have servants of their own; there are none but tall, fine-looking men in service here. Mademoiselle Kramer tells me that their lordships do n't care to have any but handsome people about them; and some of them are as prim and proper as a parson. They call them lackeys, and whenever the king goes near one of them, they

bow very low and double up with a snap, just like a pocket-knife. Oh, what lots of good things I have. If I could only send you some of them. I'm ever so glad that we shall go to the country palace in four weeks and stay there till autumn. But how's my child, and how goes it with Hansei, and with mother, and you too, Stasi? In my sleep at night, I'm always with you. I can't sleep much, for my prince is a real night-watchman, and the king's Doctor said I must n't let him cry as much as Burgei does at home. But he has good lungs, and to-morrow is the christening. The queen's brother and his wife are to be godfather and god-mother, and there'll be lots of princes and princesses besides. And I've got beautiful new dresses, and two green hats with gold lace, and two silver chains for my stomacher, and I can take them all home with me when I go, but that won't be for a long while. If all the weeks are as long as last week, I'll be seven hundred years old when I get home. I'm quite lively again. But, at first, it seemed as if I could always hear the lowing of the cow in the stable.

"She who writes this is the Countess Wildenort, from over beyond the Chamois Hill; she's a very good friend of mine. She knew our dear father, too, and you, mother, know of her family.

"And I've something to tell you, Hansei. Do n't have too much to do with the innkeeper; he's a rogue, and he'll talk your money out of your pocket. There are good folks and bad, everywhere; at home with us and here, too; and the king's doctor says you must n't give the cow any green fodder, nothing but hay, or else the milk won't agree with the child.

"I'm learning to write. Indeed I'm learning a great many things here.

"And tell me what the people say about my leaving home so suddenly, and about my having left at all.

"But I do n't care what they say. I know I've done my duty by my child, my husband, and my mother.

"And, dear mother, take a servant-girl into the house; we can afford it now.

"And, Hansei, do n't let the innkeeper wheedle you out of our money. Put it out safely at mortgage, till we have enough to buy a few acres of land.

"And do n't forget, Wednesday's the day on which father died; have a mass said for him.

"We've got a church in the house here, and I hear the organ every morning, while I stand in the passage. To-morrow will be a great day, and I remain your ever faithful

"WALPURGA ANDERMATTEN.

"I send you a little cap for my child; let her wear it every Sunday. A thousand greetings to all of you, from your

"WALPURGA."

CHAPTER XVI.

“OH, how lovely! How beautiful!—And is it all mine?—And is it you, Walpurga, of the cottage by the lake?—How proud she ’ll be!”

Such were Walpurga’s extravagant expressions of delight, while she stood looking at herself in the full-length mirror. Mademoiselle Kramer was indeed obliged to hold her back, lest she should rush through the glass in her eager desire to embrace the figure she saw reflected in it.

The court tailor had sent home the new clothes. It was difficult to decide which was the most beautiful—the stomacher, the skirt, the collar, the shirt with the short, wide sleeves—but no! the narrow rimmed hat, trimmed with flowers and gold lace and with gold tassels, was the most beautiful of all. It fitted perfectly, and was as light as a feather. “There; I ’ll just move it a little to the left. Gracious me!—Well, you are beautiful! The folks are right!” She placed her arms akimbo and danced about the room, like one possessed. And then, placing herself before the mirror, she stared into it, silently, as if lost in contemplation of her own image.

Ah, that mirror! Walpurga had never before seen her full figure, from head to foot. What could she see in the twopenny looking-glass at home? Nothing but the face and a little of the neck!

She lifted her hand to her throat. It was encircled by a necklace composed of seven rows of garnets and fastened in front with an agraffe. And how clever Mademoiselle Kramer was! How many things she could do! She had placed a large mirror behind Walpurga who could now see how she looked in the back, and on all sides. O how clever these people are! What do they know out our way? Nothing of the world, and less about themselves!

“And this is how Walpurga looks to those who walk behind her? And so,” turning herself on one side, “and so,” turning again on the other. “I must say, I like your looks; you’re not out of the way, at all! So that’s Hansel’s wife? He ought to feel satisfied with her; but then, he’s good and true and has well deserved her.”

Giddy with excitement, Walpurga thus talked to herself; it was the first time that she had ever seen a full length reflection of herself.

The first stranger who saw her thus was Baum.

He always wore shoes without heels and, putting down his whole foot at once, managed to step so softly that you could never know when he was coming. He always approached with a modest air, as if fearful of disturbing you, but always kept his own counsel and was an available tool, no matter what the nature of the service might be.

"Oh! how pretty!" he exclaimed, staring at her as if quite lost with admiration.

"It's nothing to you, sirrah, at any rate," said Walpurga; "you're a married man and I'm a married woman."

Assuming an air of command, and acting as if these were the first words uttered since he entered the apartment, Baum went on to say:

"It's the lord steward's pleasure that the nurse shall come to the court chapel immediately, if his royal highness the crown prince, is asleep. The rehearsal is about to begin."

"I've tried my clothes on," answered Walpurga.

Baum told her that it had nothing to do with trying on clothes, but that, excepting the highest personages, all who were to take part in the grand ceremonies of the morrow, were now to rehearse the order of the procession, so that there might be no confusion.

Walpurga went with Baum.

The ladies and gentlemen of the court were assembled in the throne-room. Most of them were eagerly engaged in conversation, and the confused sound of many voices was strangely echoed back from the high, vaulted ceiling. When Walpurga entered, she could hear them whispering on all sides. Some spoke French, but others used plain German, to say that the nurse was a fine specimen of a Highland peasant woman. Walpurga had a smile for every one, and was quite unembarrassed.

The lord steward, bearing a gold-headed stick in his hand, now stationed himself on the lowest step of the throne, which had been covered with an ermine mantle. He struck the floor thrice with the stick and then held it up. Every one was provided with a printed programme, and Walpurga also received one. After reading it to the company, the lord steward enjoined its strict observance on all. The procession now moved towards the chapel, passing through the picture gallery and the portrait gallery, by the way. The open space before it presented the appearance of an enchanted garden. It was filled with exotic trees, and the air was laden with the odor of flowers. The chapel was also decorated with flowers and shrubbery; and the paintings on the ceiling represented angels flying about in the air.

Countess Brinkenstein, whose appearance was even more austere than on the first evening, was engrossed with her official duties; this was no time for her to be ill.

She cautioned Walpurga, who walked beside her, to be very careful how she carried the prince, and earnestly enjoined her not to withdraw her arms until she felt quite certain that the prince was safely in his godfather's arms.

"Of course I won't; I'm not that stupid," said Walpurga.

"I require no answer from you." Countess Brinkenstein was vexed at Walpurga. She was indeed displeased with the queen,

who, she thought, was spoiling the poor servant, but found it more convenient to vent her resentment upon Walpurga than upon so exalted a personage as her majesty.

The various groups were chatting and laughing in as careless a tone as if they were in a ball-room instead of a church.

The lord steward, who had stationed himself at the altar, enquired whether all were in readiness.

"Yes," was answered from various quarters, amid much laughter.

Walpurga looked up at the image of the Virgin, which she had seen by the light of the everlasting lamp on the evening of her arrival,—it was the first time she saw it by daylight—and said: "Thou, too, must look on while they rehearse." She now fully understood Mademoiselle Kramer's remark that, for royalty, everything must be arranged in advance. But was it right to do so with sacred matters? It must be, thought she, or they would n't do it. The court chaplain was there, too, but not in his ecclesiastical robes. She saw him taking a pinch from the golden snuff box of the lord steward, with whom he was talking just as if they were in the street.

And so this is the rehearsal, thought Walpurga to herself, when Countess Brinkenstein approached and said that, as she now knew her place for the morrow, she might go. She also ordered Walpurga to wear white cotton gloves, and said that she would send her several pairs.

Walpurga went out by way of the throne-room and the picture gallery. Without looking about her, she walked on through numerous apartments, and suddenly found herself standing before a large, dark room. The door was open, but she could not see where it led to. She turned in alarm, for she had lost her way. All was silent as death. She looked out of the window and saw a street that she had never seen before. She knew not where she was, and hurried on; from a distance, she could see strange men and beasts and places on the walls, and suddenly she uttered a shriek of terror, for the devil himself, black as pitch, came towards her, gnashing his teeth.

"O Lord! Forgive me! I'll never be proud and vain again! I'll be good and honest," she cried aloud, wringing her hands.

"What are you making such a noise about? who are you?" exclaimed the devil.

"I'm Walpurga, from the lake; and I've a child and husband and mother, at home. I was brought here to be the crown prince's nurse, but, indeed, I did n't want to come."

"Indeed! and so you're the nurse. I rather like your looks."

"But I do n't want you, or any one else, to like my looks. I've a husband of my own and want nothing to do with other men." The black fellow laughed heartily.

"Then what were you doing in my master's apartments?"

"Who's your master? I've nothing to do with him. I and all good spirits praise God the Lord! Speak! What is it you want of me?"

"O, you stupid! My master is the queen's brother. I'm his valet de chambre. We arrived here last evening."

Walpurga could not understand what it all meant. Luckily for her, at that moment, the duke and the king came out of the apartment.

Addressing the Moor in English, the duke inquired what had happened; answering in the same tongue, the Moor said that the peasant woman had taken him for the devil incarnate; upon hearing which, the duke and the king laughed heartily.

"What brings you here?" enquired the king.

"I lost my way, after leaving the chapel," replied Walpurga. "My child will cry. Do please show me the way back to him."

The king instructed one of the lackeys to conduct her to her apartments. While going away she overheard the uncle, who was to be chief sponsor, saying: "What a fine milch-cow you've brought from the Highlands!"

When she had returned to her room, and again beheld herself in the large mirror, she said:

"You're nothing but a cow that can chatter, and is dressed up in clothes! Well, it served you right."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE night was a bad one. The crown prince suffered because of the fright which the Moor had given his foster-mother. Doctor Gunther sat up all night, in the adjoining room, so as to be within ready call, and was constant in his enquiries as to Walpurga and the child. He instructed Mademoiselle Kramer never again to allow the nurse to leave the room without his permission.

To Walpurga, this imprisonment was welcome, as she wished to have nothing more to do with the whole world; for the child filled her soul and, while she lay on the sofa, she vowed to God that nothing else should enter her mind. She looked at the new clothes that were spread out on the large table and shook her head; she no longer cared for the trumpery. Indeed, she almost hated it, for had it not led her into evil? and had not the punishment quickly followed?

Walpurga's sleep was broken and fitful, and whenever she closed her eyes, she beheld herself pursued by the Moor. It was not until near daybreak that she and the child slept soundly. The great ceremony could therefore take place at the appointed time.

Baum brought the beautiful pillows, and the brocaded coverlet embroidered with two wild animals. While passing Walpurga, he softly whispered:

"Keep a brave heart, so that you don't get sick again; for if you do, they will discharge you at once. I mean well by you, and that's why I say so."

He said this without moving a feature, for Mademoiselle Kramer was to know nothing of it.

Walpurga looked after him in amazement; and Baum, indeed, presented quite an odd appearance, in his grey linen undress uniform.

"And so they'll send you away when you get sick," thought she to herself. "I'm a cow. They're right. There's no longer any room in the stable for a cow that's barren."

"I and thou and the miller's cow—" said she, to the prince, as she again took him to her bosom, while she laughed and sang:

Cock a doodle doo!
The clock strikes two;
The clock strikes four,
While all sleep and snore.

Be it palace or cot,
It matters not,
Though they cook sour beets,
Or eat almonds and sweets—
As long as they care
For the little ones there.

Walpurga would have said and sung much more that day, were it not for the constant hurrying to and fro in the prince's apartments. Countess Brinkenstein came in person, and said to Walpurga:

"Have you not all sorts of secret charms which you place under the pillow for the child's sake?"

"Yes, a twig of mistletoe will do, or a nail dropped from a horse-shoe; I'd get them quick enough if I were at home; but I've nothing of the sort here."

Walpurga felt quite proud while telling what she knew of these secret charms; but grew alarmed when she looked at Countess Brinkenstein and saw that her face wore an expression of displeasure.

"Mademoiselle Kramer," said she, "you will be held responsible if this peasant woman attempts to practice any of her superstitious nonsense with the child."

Not a word of this was addressed to Walpurga, who had persuaded herself into believing that she was the first person in the palace, and now, for the first time, experienced the mortification of being ignored, just as if she were nothing more than empty air.

"I won't lose my temper, in spite of you. And I won't do you the favor to get sick, so that you may send me off," muttered Walpurga, laughing to herself, while the Countess withdrew.

And now followed a beautiful and happy hour. Two maidens came, who dressed the prince. Walpurga also allowed them to dress her, and greatly enjoyed being thus waited upon.

All the bells, throughout the city, were ringing; the chimes of the palace tower joined in the merry din, and almost caused the vast building to tremble. And now Baum came. He looked magnificent. The richly-embroidered uniform with the silver lace, the scarlet vest embroidered with gold, the short, gray-plush breeches, the white stockings, the buckled shoes—all seemed as if they had come from some enchanted closet, and Baum well knew that he was cutting a grand figure. He smiled when Walpurga stared at him, and knew what that look meant. He could afford to wait.

"One should not attempt to reap too soon," had been a favorite saying of Baroness Steigeneck's valet, and he knew what he was about.

Baum announced a chamberlain and two pages, who entered soon afterwards.

Heavy steps and words of command were heard from the adjoining room. The doors were opened by a servant and a number of cuirassiers entered the room. They were a detachment from the regiment to which the prince would belong, as soon as he had received his name.

The procession that accompanied the prince moved at the appointed hour. The chamberlain walked in advance, and then came Mademoiselle Kramer and Walpurga, the pages bringing up the rear. It was fortunate for Walpurga that Baum was at her side, for she felt so timid and bashful, that she looked about her as if imploring aid. Baum understood it all and whispered to her: "Keep up your courage, Walpurga!" She merely nodded her thanks, for she could not utter a word. Bearing the child on her arms, she passed through the crowd of cuirassiers who, with drawn swords and glittering coats of mail, stood there like so many statues. Suddenly, she thought of where she had been last Sunday at the same hour. If Hansei could only see this, too. And Franz, tailor Schneck's son, is in the cuirassiers—perhaps he, too, is among those lifeless ones; but they must be alive, for their eyes sparkle. She looked up, but did not recognize the tailor's son, although he was in the line.

The prince's train, with its escort, passed on to the so-called grand centre gallery, where the procession was forming.

Walpurga had been told to seat herself with the prince on the lowest step of the throne, and when she looked about her she beheld a sea of splendor and beauty. There were richly embroidered costumes, lovely women, their heads adorned with flowers, and jewels that sparkled like dew-drops on the meadow at early morn.

"Good morning, Walpurga! Pray do n't rise," said a pleasant

voice, addressing her. It was Countess Irma. But she had scarcely commenced speaking to her, when the lord steward thrice struck the floor with his gold-headed stick, the diamonds on which sparkled brightly.

A train of halberdiers, wearing gay plumes on their helmets, marched in from a side apartment. And then the king came. He carried his helmet in his left hand and at his side. His face was radiant with happiness.

At his side walked the duchess, a diamond crown on her head, and with two pages bearing her long silk train. She was followed by a numerous and brilliant suite.

Irma had hastened to her appropriate place. The bells were slowly tolling, and the procession moved. At the entrance of the palace chapel, the duchess took the child from the nurse and carried it up to the altar, where priests, clad in splendid robes, were awaiting it, and where countless lights were burning.

Walpurga followed, feeling as if bereft—not only as if the clothes had been torn from her body, but as if the body had been rent from her soul. The child cried aloud, as if aware of what was taking place, but its voice was drowned by the tones of the organ and choir. The whole church was filled with a mighty volume of sound, which descended from the gallery and was echoed back from the floor beneath, like sullen, muttering thunder. Involuntarily, Walpurga fell on her knees at the altar—there was no need to order her to do so.

Choir, organ and orchestra burst forth with a mighty volume of sound, and Walpurga, overwhelmed with awe and surprise, imagined that the end of the world had come and that the painted angels on the ceiling,—aye, the very pillars, too—were swelling the heavenly harmonies.

Suddenly all was silent again.

The child received its names. One would not suffice; there were eight; a whole section of the calendar had been emptied for its benefit.

But from that moment until she reached her room, Walpurga knew nothing of what had happened.

When she found herself alone with Mademoiselle Kramer, she asked:

“Well, and what am I to call my prince?”

“None of us know. He has three names until he succeeds to the throne, when he himself selects one, under which he reigns, and which is stamped on the coins.”

“I’ve something to tell you,” said Walpurga, “and mind you do n’t forget it. You must send me the first ducat you have stamped with your name and your picture! See! he gives me his hand on it!” cried she, exultingly, when the child stretched out its little hand as if to grasp hers. “O you dear Sunday child!

Let the first lady of the bedchamber say it's superstition—it's true, for all. I'm a cow and you're a Sunday child, and Sunday children understand the language of the beasts. But that's only once a year—at midnight on Christmas eve. But as you're a prince, I'm sure you can do more than the rest."

Walpurga was called into the queen's apartment, the dazzling beauty of which suggested a glittering cavern in fairy-land. All was quiet; here nothing was heard of the noisy, bustling crowd overhead. The queen said:

"On that table you will find a roll containing a hundred gold pieces. It is your christening present from my brother and the other sponsors. Does it make you happy?"

"O queen! If the lips on these gold pieces could speak, the hundred together could n't tell you how happy I am. It's too much! Why, you could buy half our village with it! With that much you could buy—"

"Don't excite yourself! Keep calm! Come here, and I'll give you something else, for myself. May this little ring always remind you of me, and may your hand thus be as if it were mine, doing good to the child."

"O my queen! How happy it must make you to be able to speak right out when your heart is full of kind thoughts, and to have it in your power to do so many great and good actions; besides, God must love you very much, to permit so much good to be done by your hand! I thank you with all my heart! And to Him who has given it all to you, a thousand thanks!"

"Walpurga, your words do me more good than all that the archbishop and the rest of them said. I shall not forget them!"

"I do n't know what I've said—but it's all your fault! When I'm with you, I—I hardly know how to say it—but I feel as if I were standing before the holy of holies in the church. O, what a heavenly creature you are! You're all heart! I'll tell the child of it, and though it does n't understand what I say, it'll feel it all. From me it shall get only good thoughts of you! I beg your pardon now, if I should ever offend you, even in thought, or do anything out of the way—" She could say no more.

The queen motioned Walpurga to be quiet and held out her hand to her; neither spoke another word. Angels were indeed passing through the silent room.

Walpurga went away. It was self-confidence, not boldness, that made her look straight into the faces of the courtiers whom she passed by the way. As far as she was concerned, they did not exist.

When she was with the child again, she said:

"Yes, drink in my whole soul! It's all yours! If you do n't become a man in whom God and the world can take delight, you do n't deserve a mother like yours!"

Mademoiselle Kramer was amazed at Walpurga's words. But the latter did not care to tell what was passing in her mind. There was perfect silence, and yet she sat there, motionless, as if she could still hear the organ and the singing of the angels.

"It is n't this that makes me so happy," said she, looking at the money once more. "It must be just this way when one gets to heaven and the Lord says: 'I'm glad you've come!' O, if I could only fly there now! I do n't know what to do with myself."

She loosened all her clothes; the world seemed too close and confined to contain her.

"God be praised! the day's over," said she, when she lay down to rest that evening. "It was a hard day, but a beautiful one; more beautiful than I'll ever see again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

(IRMA TO HER FRIEND EMMA.)

"YOU ask me how I like the great world. The great world, dear Emma, is but a little world, after all. But I can readily understand why they term it 'great.' It has a firmament of its own. Two suns rise daily; I mean their majesties, of course. A gracious glance, or a kind word, from either—and the day is clear and bright. Should they ignore you, the weather is dull and dreary.

"The queen is all feeling, and lives in a transcendental world of her own, into which she would fain draw everyone. She suggests a 'Jean Paul' born after his time, and is of a tender, clinging disposition, constantly vacillating between the dawn and twilight of emotion, and always avoiding the white light of day. She is exceedingly gracious towards me, but we cannot help feeling that we do not harmonize.

"I know not why it is, but I have of late frequently thought of a saying of my father's: 'Whenever you find yourself on friendly or affectionate terms with any one, imagine how he would seem if he had become your enemy!'

"The thought follows me like a phantom, I know not why. It must be my evil spirit.

"All here regard me as wonderfully naïve, simply because I have the courage to think for myself. I have not inherited the spectacles and tight-lacing of tradition. The world seem to follow the fashion, even in clothing the inside of their heads.

"I admire the first lady of the bedchamber most of all. She is the law incarnate, carefully covered with *poudre de riz*. The ladies here ridicule her, but I have only pity for those who are obliged to resort to the use of cosmetics. Ah, you can have no idea, my dear Emma, how stupid and bored some persons are

when unable to indulge in scandal. There are but few who know how to enjoy themselves innocently. But I am forgetting that I intended to tell you about Countess Brinkenstein.

"She read me a lecture on etiquette. What a pity that I cannot give it to you, word for word. She said many pretty things; for instance,—that we have as little right to doubt in matters of etiquette as in religion, that, in either case, reasoning always led to heresy and schism, and that one ought to feel happy to have the law ready made, instead of being obliged to frame it.

"Countess Brinkenstein, like Socrates the peripatetic, teaches by example. In the park of the summer palace there is a jutting rock, from the top of which a fine view can be obtained. It is protected on all sides by an iron rail. 'Do you observe, my dear Countess,' said this high priest of etiquette to me—for she seems to have conceived quite an affection for your humble servant—'it is because we know there is a railing, that we feel perfectly safe here. If it were not for that, we should become too dizzy to remain. It is just the same with the laws of court etiquette; remove the railing and there will be some one falling every day.'

"The king enjoys conversing with Brinkenstein and, although decorous and dignified demeanor best pleases him, he is not averse to unconstrained cheerfulness. The queen is too serious; she is always grand organ. But one cannot dance to organ music and, as we are still young, we often feel like dancing. Brinkenstein must have commended me to the king, for he often addresses me, and in a manner that seems to say: 'We understand each other perfectly.'"

"June 1st (at night).

"It is a pity, dear Emma, that what I have written above bears no date. I have completely forgotten when I wrote it—*auld lang syne*, as it says in the pretty Scotch song.

"I feel the justice of your complaint, that my letters are written for myself and not for the one to whom they are addressed; that is, whenever I feel like writing, but not when you happen to wish for news. But you are wrong in charging this to egotism. I am not an egotist. I am wholly absorbed by the impressions of the moment. Ah, why are you not here with me! There is not a day, not a night, not an hour— But I shall do better. That is, I mean to try, at all events.

"The king distinguishes me above all others, and I enjoy the favor of the whole court. If it were not for the demon that ever whispers to me—

"I send you my photograph. We are now wearing wings on our hats, and the feather you see on mine was taken from an eagle that the king shot with his own hand.

"O what lovely days and nights we are having. If one could only do without sleep. I am giving great attention to music and

sing nothing but Schumann. His music invests the soul with a magic veil, with a fire that seems to consume while it fills you with happiness, and from the spell of which none can escape, though they try ever so hard. I gladly yield to its influence. I have just been singing 'The heavens have kissed the earth.' It was late at night, and I felt as if I could go on singing forever. You know my habit of repeating the same song again and again; of all things a *pot pourri* of the emotions is least to my liking. At last I lay down by the window—who was it that glided past? I dare not say. I do not care to know. There was a humming in the direction of the lamp on my table. A moth-fly had flown into it and had been consumed by the flame. The moth had not wished to die; it had imagined the light to be a glowing flower-cup, and had buried itself in it.

"It was a beautiful death! To die in the summer night, amid song and in the light of the fiery calyx. Good night!"

"June 3d.

"No matter where I am or what I do, I am always excited, without knowing why. But I have it, after all. I am constantly thinking that this letter to you is still lying in my portfolio. If any one at court knew what I have written.—I have already been on the point of burning these sheets. I beg of you, destroy them. You will,—will you not? or else conceal them in some safe place. I cannot help it, I must tell you all.

"The queen is very kind to me. Her present condition invests her with a touching, I might almost say, a sacred character.

"'Man is God's temple,' said the archbishop, who paid us a visit yesterday, 'and of no one is this so true as of a young mother; above all, a young royal mother.'

"What a noble thought!

"I now think quite differently of the queen. When she said to me, yesterday: 'Countess Irma, the king speaks of you with great affection, and I am very glad of it,' I thought to myself: Blessed be the etiquette that permits me to bend down before the queen and kiss her hand.

"Her hand is now quite full and round."

"June 5th.

"The most cheerful hours are those we spend at breakfast. I do not know how, after such olympic moments, the rest can content themselves with every day matters, for I always wing my flight into the boundless realm of music.

"The king is very kind to me. He is of a noble and earnest character. While I was walking with him in the park, yesterday, and we both kept step so beautifully, he said:

"'You seem like a true comrade to me, for we always walk together in perfect step. No woman has ever walked thus with me. With the queen I am always obliged to slacken my usual pace.'

"That is only of late, I suppose."

"No, it is always so. Will you permit me, when we are alone, to address you as my good comrade?"

"We stopped where we were, like two children who have lost their way in the woods and do not know where they are."

"Let us return," was all I could say.

"We went back to the palace. I admire the king's self-control, for he at once entered into earnest conversation with his minister. Such self-control can only result from great education and innate mental power."

"But there is one thing more. Let me confide it to you."

"I feel sure that the queen meditates a step which must needs be fraught with evil to the king, to herself, and to who knows how many more. I would have liked to acquaint him with my fears, but I dared not speak of the queen at that time, and Doctor Gunther, the king's physician, had made me afraid to utter a word on the subject. I am talking in riddles, I know. I will explain all to you at some future day, if you remind me of it. In a few weeks, all will be decided. My lips are not sealed, for the queen has confided nothing to me. I have simply reasoned from appearances. But enough of this. I shall no longer torment you with riddles."

"My best friend, after all, is Doctor Gunther. He is great by nature, and still more so by education. He is always up to his own high standard. I have never yet seen him confused or uncertain. The old fashioned phrase, a 'wise man,' is, indeed, applicable to him. He is not fond of so-called 'spirituality' or 'intellectuality,' for he is truly wise. He has great command of language. His hands are beautiful, almost priestly, as if formed for blessing. He never loses his equanimity and, what is best of all, never indulges in superlatives. When I once mentioned this to him, he agreed with me, and added: 'I should like to deprive the world of its superlatives for the next fifty years; that would oblige men to think and feel more clearly and distinctly than they now do.'

"Do you not, dear Emma, perfectly agree with this? Let us found an *anti-superlative* society. I admire the man, but will never be able successfully to imitate him. Through him, I have learned to believe that there have been great and wise men on earth. While yet a surgeon in the army, he was my father's friend. Afterward, he filled a professorship in Switzerland, and, for the last eighteen years, has been physician to the king. You would be delighted with him. To know him, is to enrich one's life. If I were to write down all his sayings, half the charm were lost, for you would lose the spell of his presence. He has a most convincing air and a sonorous voice, and I have heard that he used to sing very well. He is a perfect man, and loves me as if I were his niece. I shall have much more to tell you about him. Above all things, I am glad that he has a fine vein of humor. This

furnishes the salt and prevents him from being included among the class of sugar-water beings.

"Colonel Bronnen is his best, perhaps his only intimate, friend, and the Doctor recently told me that the Colonel's manner and appearance greatly resemble that of my father while a young man."

"June 15th.

"Ah, how hateful, how horrible is the thought of man's birth and death! To die—to be laid in the earth, and to know that the eyes that once glowed with life, and the lips that once smiled, are to decay. The very idea is a barbarous one. Why do we know of death? We must be immortal, or else it were terrible that we human beings should alone know that we must die. The moth-fly did not know it. It simply thought the burning light was a lovely flower, and died in that belief.

"Since last evening, we have been greatly concerned for the queen, indeed, for a double life. She was so good, so angelic.—But no, she still is, and will remain so. She will live. I have prayed for it with all my heart. Away with doubts! My prayer must avail.

"When I met the king to-day he scarcely looked at me, and it is better for me, that it should be thus. A feeling was beginning to bud within me, and now I pluck it out by the roots. It dare not be. I will be his comrade; his good, his best comrade.

"My piano, my music, my pictures, my statuettes, my bird—all seem strange to me. A human being, a two-fold life, is in mortal danger. What does all the trumpery in the world amount to now? All of it together cannot save a human life. Is original sin a truth, and is it because of that, that man must pass through the throes of death before he can behold the light?

"I would like to read, but there is no book that can serve one in such moments. One cannot even think. Nothing, nothing can be done. All the wisdom in all the books is of no avail."

"June 16th.

"Hallelujah! I have just come from church. O that my song could reach you. I have just sung the Hallelujah as if I were pouring out my whole soul to God above.

"Hallelujah!

"All is well!

"The crown prince is born!

"The queen is doing well. The king is happy, the world is bright, and the blue sky overhead is cloudless.

"God be praised, that I have so soon escaped from my perplexing doubts. Perhaps it was all imagination, after all. There was not the slightest ground for my alarm.

"I am but a silly cloister plant, after all, and do not yet understand the ways of the court. Is it not so? I see you laughing at

me, and see the dimples in your cheeks. I send you many kisses. Ah, all are so good and pious, and holy, and happy, and— If I could only compose, I should produce some great work. A mute Beethoven dwells within my soul."

" July 18th.

"The crown prince's nurse is a peasant woman, from the Highlands. At the king's desire, I paid her a visit. I was standing by the prince's cradle, when the king approached.

"Softly he whispered to me: 'It is indeed true; there is an angel standing by my child's cradle.'

"My hand was on the rail, and his hand rested on mine.

"The king left the room, and just imagine what happened afterwards.

"The nurse, a fresh and hardy-looking peasant woman, with shrewd blue eyes—a perfect rustic beauty, indeed, to whom I had been kind in order to cheer her up, and prevent her from growing homesick—now turned upon me and told me harshly, and to my face: 'You're an adulteress; you've been exchanging love-glances with the king!'

"Emma, I now feel the force of what you have often said to me: 'You idolize the people; but they are just as sinful and corrupt as the great world, and without education to curb and restrain them.'

"But what is the peasant woman to me, after all? Certain persons exist, only in so far as they serve our purposes.

"No, she is a good and sensible woman, and has asked me to forgive her boldness. I shall remain her friend. I shall, indeed."

" June 25th.

"The king evinces the greatest kindness towards me. It is only yesterday that he remarked to me, while passing:

"Should you ever have a secret, confide it to me.'

"He knows full well that I could hardly go to my brother, as a sister should, and that my father is so far away.

"Colonel Bronnen, of the queen's regiment, is very attentive to me. He is usually quite reserved. Ah, how I envy those who possess such self-control. I have none. The demonstrative are always flattering themselves that their irrepressibility is simple honesty, whereas it is nothing but weakness.

"Bronnen tells me that you write to him at times. Can it be possible that a single thought of yours enters this palace, without being mine?

"I am delighted to know that we return to the summer palace in a fortnight from now. Cities ought to vanish during the summer. We ought to be able to transport our houses into the woods, among the mountains, or in the valleys, and in the winter they might be brought together again.

"Last evening, while we were sitting on the verandah, we were greatly amused by a joke of my brother Bruno's. He gave us a

description of what might happen if the feet of all the four-post bedsteads in the city were endowed with life and, with their contents, were to come stalking along the garden-walks. It was very droll. Of course, there was some little that was scarcely proper; but Bruno, with all his impertinence, has so charming a manner that he knew how to couch his descriptions in most discreet yet piquant terms.

"It was this that suggested the idea of a migration of houses.

"It was a lively evening, full of merry jests that still seem to ring in my ears while I write to you.

"The king has a new walking-stick—he has quite a collection of such—and this one pays court to me. I am said to be intellectual, and this walking-stick is intellectual *par excellence*, and 'birds of a feather flock together,' you know.

"It is Baron Schnabelsdorf, privy councilor of one of the legations.

"Picture to yourself a dapper, beardless bachelor, always in faultless attire. Every one of the few hairs left him is made to do service, and is artistically brushed up into the form of a cock's comb. He passes for an authority in matters of statecraft. He has just returned from Rome, and was formerly attached to the embassies at Paris and Madrid and, if I am not mistaken, that at Stockholm, also. He is a fluent and ready anecdotist. He must have a familiar spirit who crams for him, for he knows everything, from the cut of Queen Elizabeth's sleeve to the latest discoveries in the milky-way and the recent excavations at Nineveh. The ladies and gentlemen have several times amused themselves by reading up one or more articles in the encyclopedia, and then directing their conversation to the subjects they had prepared themselves upon. But the omniscient Baron was, even then, better informed as to dates and circumstances than they were. He is always provided with a *bonbonnière* full of piquant anecdotes. He is almost constantly with the king, and it is rumored that a high position will soon be conferred upon him.

"What do you think of it? had I better marry him?

"My brother would like me to do so and, although he stoutly denies it, I still believe that Schnabelsdorf sent him to broach the affair to me. I could not help laughing, if I were to stand at the altar with this learned walking-stick. But it is, nevertheless, very flattering to know that so learned a man desires me as his spouse. I must be excessively learned and clever, and you ought to respect me accordingly.

"A thousand greetings and kisses, from

"Your ever spoiled

"IRMA.

"P. S.—The queen's brother, the hereditary prince of —, was at the christening, and his wife was also present. She rarely

utters a word, but is beautiful. It is reported that the hereditary prince intends to seek a divorce from her, as she is childless. If, as really seems to be the case, she loves her husband, how terribly the poor thing must feel. She must have noticed my interest in her, for she treats me with marked favor, and has more to say to me than any one else. She wishes me to ride with her. The christening ceremonies were impressive and beautiful. At church, I wore a white moiré dress, and a veil fastened to my *coiffure*. At the banquet, Baron Schoning, the chamberlain, escorted me to the table. I am regarded here as of a highly poetic temperament, and the chamberlain has already presented me with a copy of his poems. (You know them. He has disguised his sublime emotions in the Highland dialect.) He affects my company and, while at table, told me lots of fearfully silly stuff. Well, as I was going to say, at the banquet I wore a dress of sea-green silk, cut out square *a la madonna*, and in my hair a simple wreath of heather. They all said that I looked very well, and I am inclined to believe that they told the truth."



BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

LIFE at the palace again moved in its wonted channel. Bulletins as to the condition of the queen and the crown prince, were no longer issued. The amnesty which had been proclaimed in consequence of the happy event, had been received with satisfaction throughout the land.

Irma spent much of her time in the crown prince's apartments, and endeavored to enter into the feelings of the peasant woman who had been transplanted into a world that was entirely new and strange to her. She was greatly amused by the droll conceits that this new life awakened in Walpurga. Her peculiar way of looking at things was frequently in accord with Walpurga's simple-minded notions, and when Irma was absent, the nurse would speak to the child for hours, endeavoring, as it were, to outdo herself with all sorts of droll expressions which, eccentric as they were, failed to satisfy her.

A strong and deep spring of happiness and content, earnest resolve and all that makes men true, welled up from Walpurga's soul and ministered to the benefit of the babe that she had pressed to her bosom; the child had become as a part of herself.

With constant regularity the prince was daily carried to the queen. That was the event of the day, after which, life, in the crown prince's apartments, went on in its usual course.

Doctor Gunther now relaxed his orders; for one day, he said: "The weather is charming, and it will do the prince good to send him out of doors for a little while. We will arrange it in this way:—At eleven o'clock, you can drive out with Walpurga and the prince, as far as the Nymph's Grove. Arrived there, you can walk about with the child under the pines, or can sit down, if you wish to do so. After remaining there about half an hour, you will return and at once remove to the new apartments. You have taken good care of yourself, Walpurga; continue to do so. Let nothing move you from your accustomed ways, and you will continue to afford pleasure to all of us, as well as to yourself."

Walpurga was quite beside herself with happiness. "We're going out riding," said she to the child, when the physician had left. "God sends you everything good while you are asleep. But you'll let me have some, too, won't you? for you've a good heart, and I've given you mine."

Walpurga would have continued in this vein for a long while, but Mademoiselle Kramer came up and, while gently patting her cheeks, said: "You'll have red cheeks again. Show your love for the prince, with calmness and moderation, and not with such extravagant expressions."

"You're right," said Walpurga. "It's true; I'm not always so. I was always cheerful, but prudent at the same time; not so giddy as I now am," said she, after she had walked up and down the room several times, and had at last sat down by the window.

"I'll tell you what ails me."

"Indeed, does anything ail you?"

"Yes, the worst of all ills. I've nothing to do. I don't know what to put my hands to. This constant talking, dressing and undressing, eating and drinking, with nothing else to do, makes me stupid. The next time the Doctor comes, tell him to give me some work. I'll carry wood or do anything that is to be done. They're mowing the grass in the palace garden, and if I could only be down there with them, I'd feel the better of it. No man could beat me at mowing grass. Grubersepp often used to say that the women sharpened their scythes seven times as often as the men, but that never happened with me."

"Oh, that would never do. But I shall see that you get some exercise."

"Come, you're to go out of doors, into the fresh air," said Walpurga to the prince.

Thy cage is open! Fly away,
Far o'er land and sea.
But tell me, birdie; tell me pray,—
Where can my darling be?

"What a pity that the birds have stopped singing. Yes, dear child, they only sing so long as there are young ones in the nest; but I shall have you in my nest for a whole year, and I'll sing better than the birds could,"—and she sang:

Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me.

My heart doth bear a burden, love,
And thou hast placed it there—
And I would wager e'en my life
That none doth heavier bear.

"Brava! charming!" said Countess Irma, entering the room. "I should like to learn that song. Sing it again."

Walpurga repeated it and, at the second verse, Irma joined in the song.

"It does n't really suit a child," said Walpurga, "but what does such a youngster know about lowing cows or singing birds? It's all one to him. We're going out riding to-day. Do you go with us?"

"I would be glad to ride with you, but I may not," replied Countess Irma.

"Then you're not allowed to do whatever you please."

Her words surprised Irma: "What do you mean?" asked she, sharply.

"Forgive me, if I've said anything stupid. I only meant to say that you're in service as well as the rest of us. You're a maid-of-honor, I believe."

"All must serve some one; the king and queen serve God."

"We must all do that."

"Yes, but princes have a much harder time of it than we, for theirs is a far greater responsibility. But what am I saying? You ought to feel happy that you need n't know everything. I've brought some writing copies for you. I owe you thanks for one thing, already. Ever since I've resolved to teach you, my own writing has become far plainer than before—"

Irma suddenly checked herself, for she realized the full force of what she had been saying, and continued: "for you are to learn it thoroughly."

Baum came to announce that the carriage was waiting. Irma left, saying that she would meet Walpurga in the park.

They now went out and Baum let down the carriage steps for them. Mademoiselle Kramer, who was the first to enter, held the child until Walpurga had seated herself. Baum jumped up behind and took his place beside the second lackey; the four horses stepped out and the carriage started.

"Are we driving?" asked Walpurga.

"Certainly."

"It seems like flying. I can't hear the least rumbling of the wheels."

"Of course you can't. The tires are covered with india rubber."

"And so they wear cloth shoes just as we do when we walk on smooth floors. Oh how clever they all are here. Out yonder, they do n't know a thing. They live just like cattle; the only difference is they do n't eat grass—but what's the matter?" said she, starting with fright. "They're beating the drums and the soldiers are rushing towards us. Is there a fire somewhere?"

"That's on our account. The guard always present arms when a member of the royal family passes by—watch them. They're presenting arms, and after we've passed they'll lay their muskets aside and return to the guard-room. Their regiment is known as the crown prince's, for it belongs to him."

"And so he'll have live soldiers to play with when he grows up."

Mademoiselle Kramer showed all the self-command fitting one who could boast of a line of sixteen ancestors. A slight start and an odd, nervous twitching of the features, as if suppressing a yawn, were the only visible effects of Walpurga's words. But of laughter there was not a sign. An upper servant of the right sort must hear and see all that is going on, and yet stand by as if he were no more than the table or plate that can be moved about at will; and although Walpurga was not her superior, it would not do to laugh at her, for she was nurse to his royal highness the crown prince. Mademoiselle Kramer therefore refrained from laughing, and, as if to evade answering, merely said; "When we pass the guard on our way home, the same thing will happen again."

"And may I ask what's the good of it all?"

"Certainly; there is a good reason for everything, and this serves to accustom the people, and especially the soldiers, to show proper respect to their superiors."

"But our prince don't know anything of that."

"We must show our respect for him, even though he know nothing of it; and now let me tell you something which it would be well for you to know. Whenever you speak or think of their majesties, the king and queen, let it be as 'his majesty' or 'her majesty,' but never simply as king or queen, so that you may never so far forget yourself as to speak or think of them in a disrespectful manner. Bear this in mind."

Walpurga scarcely heard a word of what she said.

"Oh Lord!" she exclaimed, "how wisely they've arranged everything. It must have taken many thousand years before they could get so far."

"It has, indeed. But you need n't nod to every one you see bowing. It is n't meant for you."

"But I'd like to do it for my prince, until he can attend to it himself. They all show how glad they'd be to get a look at him. They all bow to you, my child—you're well off, indeed—oh, what a lovely carriage this is. It's as soft as a bed, and as comfortable as a room, and you can sit here and see all that's going on outside, and—dear me, how fast we're going."

They turned into the park. The carriage drove slowly while they passed the lake, and Walpurga was ever saying:

"I feel as if I were in fairy-land."

They alighted by the shady and fragrant Grove of the Nymphs. As soon as she had left the carriage, Walpurga, who was carrying the child in her arms, said:

"Open your eyes! Look about you! The whole world's yours. There are trees and meadows and, overhead, the blue sky. But your father can't give you that; you'll have to earn it by being good, and if you and I both remain good, we'll meet again, up above."

"Sit down here, Walpurga, and pray cease talking," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

She was terribly anxious about Walpurga, who talked incessantly and incoherently, and was as unmanageable as a young foal that has just been let loose in the meadow.

For this reason, Mademoiselle Kramer again remarked: "Speak softly, and address all your remarks to me. I should be sorry if the lackeys behind us were making sport of you. Do you see the outrider over there? He is my nephew." Walpurga had not, until then, noticed that two lackeys, one of whom was Baum, were following them. The carriage was being driven up and down the side avenues. Suddenly, Walpurga stopped, as if spellbound, before a marble figure.

"Is n't it beautiful?" asked Mademoiselle Kramer.

"Fie!" replied Walpurga. "It's abominable; and to think of men and women walking about here and looking at such an object."

When the old king had the statues placed in the park, Mademoiselle Kramer had deemed them objectionable, but as their majesties had found them beautiful, she had gradually come to look upon them in the same light.

They went into a side avenue, where Walpurga sat down on a bench and, falling into a reverie, soon knew as little of the world as did the child in her arms.

"Who's there?" said she, as if awakened from sleep.

Riding between two horsemen, she beheld a lady mounted on a glossy black steed. Her riding habit was of blue and the long flowing veil fastened to her hat was of the same color.

"It looks like the Countess."

"It is she, and now they dismount. His majesty the king and their royal highnesses the hereditary prince and princess, are with her. They are coming this way," said Mademoiselle Kramer. "Keep your seat. As nurse, you need not trouble yourself about being polite."

But Walpurga could not help putting her hands up to her hat, in order to feel whether the tassel at the back and the flowers in front were still in place.

Mademoiselle Kramer begged their highnesses not to look at the sleeping child, lest they might awaken it.

Irma was the first to speak. "How deeply significant are all of nature's laws. The waking eye arouses the sleeping child. In the depths of every human soul, an infant soul rests sleeping, and it is not well to permit either sympathy or idle curiosity to disturb it."

"I would like to know how you always manage to have such original thoughts," replied the king.

"I do n't know," replied Irma, playing with her riding whip. "I've courage enough to say what I think, and that passes for

originality. Nearly all human beings are changelings. They were changed while in the cradle of education."

The king laughed. Walpurga however, quickly turned her thumbs inward, and said.

"Changeling. It's wrong to speak of anything of that sort before a child that's less than seven months old, for the evil spirits are all powerful up to that time, even if the child is christened."

In order to exorcise any evil spell from the child, she breathed upon it thrice.

The princess looked sadly at the nurse and the child, but did not utter a word.

"I do n't understand a word of what the nurse says," remarked the hereditary prince.

Walpurga blushed scarlet.

"Why do you look at me so?" asked Countess Irma, "don't you know me?"

"Of course I do, but do you know who you look like? like the Lady of the Lake. When she rises from the waves, her dress hangs about her in a sea of folds just like yours."

Irma laughed, while she, in High German, told the prince and princess what the nurse had been saying. The prince nodded to Walpurga much as he would have done with a dumb animal to which he could not render himself intelligible.

"But Countess Irma's feet are not swan's feet. Do n't believe that, Walpurga," said the king laughing. "Come, 'Lady of the Lake.'"

They mounted their horses and rode away.

It was time for the prince to return.

On their return, they at once repaired to the new apartments on the ground floor, into which everything had been removed during their absence.

They now had sunlight at all hours of the day. The apartments opened out on the park where the blackbird sang in the broad daylight, and where the breezes were laden with the odor of the orange bushes. Tall trees were whispering in the wind and a great fountain was constantly murmuring and plashing.

Walpurga was quite happy and the fountain was her greatest delight.

"It's far more comfortable on the first floor," she would often say; "I feel as if I'd just returned from a long journey. The rooms are so nice and cool, and my night-watchman sleeps in the daytime just as a night-watchman should, and—and—"

And Walpurga, too, fell asleep, although 't was daylight.

CHAPTER II.

WALPURGA soon accustomed herself to her changed mode of life. She was often concerned because she received no tidings from home.

But if there were no letters, there was a messenger at all events. A servant entered the room and said:

"There's a woman outside, who comes from the same place as Walpurga. She wishes to speak to you for a few moments."

"I'll go to her. Who is it?"

"No," said Mademoiselle Kramer; "receive her here."

The servant went out at once, and returned, bringing old Zenza with him.

"Oh, is it you, Zenza? Have you brought me anything from my child, my husband, or my mother? For God's sake, has anything happened? Are they sick?"

"No, they're all well, thank God, and send their love to you."

Walpurga, with an affectionate glance, gazed into Zenza's cunning eyes, which now seemed good and truthful, because they had seen her child. Smiling, Zenza went on to say:

"I'm glad you still know me. How bad the folks are. They told me you would n't recognize me, because you'd become a fine lady. But no, you always were a good girl, and I've always said so."

"Yes, yes, that's all very well; but what do you want of me?"

"I want you to help me. If you don't, my son Thomas will take his life and I'll drown myself in the lake. You'll help me, won't you? See, I'm kneeling at your feet. You must help me. Your dear father and I were almost cousins, and if your father were alive, he'd say what he's now calling down to you from heaven—'Walpurga, if you do n't help Zenza, I'll never forgive you.'"

"Get up! What's the matter? How can I help you?"

"I won't get up. I'll die at your feet unless you promise to help me."

"I'll do all I can for you."

Mademoiselle Kramer interposed and said that unless Zenza would calm herself, she would not be allowed to remain in the room another moment.

Zenza arose and asked:

"Is that the queen?"

Walpurga and Mademoiselle Kramer laughed at her question, and Zenza at last made known her wish.

Her son Thomas, she said, was standing down there before the palace, as the guard would not allow him to enter. He had been caught poaching and, as it was his second offense, he had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. And yet he was not to

blame. It lay in his blood. He *must* go hunting. His father had been that way before him. He had only shot one little chamois buck and for that he was to go to jail again. He had sworn an oath that, before he would let them lock him up, he would take his own life or else commit a murder, so that they might behead him at once; and Zenza went on to say that Walpurga would have two, — nay, three human lives on her conscience if she did not help them; that Walpurga must procure her an audience with the king or queen, so that she might, on her knees, beg them for mercy.

"Your husband and the landlord of the Chamois sent me," added Zenza, "and they both say it'll be easy enough for you to help me, and if you do, I'll be your slave as long as I live."

"Yes, I'd like to help you, but I can't see how. Things are not managed here as they are at home."

"Oh, you can find a way, quick enough. You're clever, the whole neighborhood says so; and I've known it ever so long, and said so, too, on last St. Leonard's day. Schneck, the tailor, will bear me witness, and so will Spinnerwastl, too; 'Walpurga bears herself,' said I, 'as if she were one of the lowliest, but she's the first in the whole neighborhood. You'll all live to see what becomes of her. Her wisdom and her goodness will show themselves.' Now, Walpurga, you'll help me; won't you?"

"Yes, as soon as there's a chance."

"But I can't wait. Thomas is to go to jail to-morrow at day-break, and, if he's not released to-day, there will be murder."

"My dear woman," interposed Mademoiselle Kramer, "his majesty the king declared a general amnesty at the birth of the crown prince. That covers your son's case, does it not?"

"No; that's the very trouble. All the courts in the country are against my Thomas. Look at this. It's all there. The innkeeper wrote it down, better than I can tell you. The writing must reach the king before noon, or it'll be too late. My son Thomas is walking up and down out there, and it's an even chance whether he goes to heaven or hell. He's got a double-barrelled pistol with him, and he'll shoot the first man he looks at and himself, too, before this very palace, if I go out there without having done anything for him."

"Yes, but I can't run up to the king as I would to the innkeeper, or I'd gladly do it."

"I must sit down, my knees are breaking under me," exclaimed Zenza, and Mademoiselle Kramer hurried to bring her a chair. And while she sat there with drooping head, great tears dropped upon the bony, thick-veined hands that lay folded on her knees.

Walpurga motioned to Mademoiselle Kramer, who was trying to console the old woman. She wanted to tell her that Zenza was not so very good, after all, and that Thomas was still worse; but Mademoiselle Kramer turned about and said:

"I have an idea. Countess Wildenort's brother is aid-de-camp to his majesty, and, in half an hour from now, will present his report and get the countersign. Now, Walpurga, go to Countess Irma at once and request her to hand the petition to her brother, so that he may submit it to his majesty."

"Yes, yes, do go—do! Lord, what a wise angel you have here with you, Walpurga;—but go right off—do n't lose a moment! May I stay here a little while longer, or shall I wait down there before the palace?"

"No! you may remain here, my good woman," said Mademoiselle Kramer, consoling her. "But hurry yourself," said she, addressing Walpurga, who still held the letter before her, and stood there as if immovable.

Walpurga left the apartment. When she drew near to Irma's door, she heard the Countess, with fervid expression, singing Schumann's song to Friedrich Rueckert's words:

He came to me,
In storm and rain,
And boldly, he
My heart hath ta'en.

Was my heart won,
Or his, that day?
Methinks both hearts
Did meet half-way.

The chambermaid announced Walpurga. Irma stopped in the middle of her song.

"Welcome! What good thought brings you here?"

Walpurga hesitated, but, at last, preferred her request and handed the paper to the Countess.

"Take courage," said Irma, consolingly.

She rang for a servant, to whom she said: "Tell my brother to come here at once." Then, addressing Walpurga, she continued: "I'll add a few words of my own. Be calm. I am glad to be able to grant your request. I've often wanted to ask you whether there was not some wish that you would like to have gratified. The king will surely grant the pardon."

Walpurga would have liked to interrupt her, but everything seemed as if bewitched. Before she could say a word, the aid-de-camp had come. Irma begged him to wait while she added a few lines of her own.

The aid-de-camp had taken his leave. Irma passed her hand over Walpurga's face and said: "Let me banish all your sad thoughts. Be happy and take my word for it—the man is saved. Go to the poor woman and quiet her in the meanwhile. I'll bring the answer to your room."

Walpurga could not find words, or she would have said some-

thing, even then. But the petition had already gone. After all, no one would be harmed in the matter, and, although Thomas really was a wicked fellow, this might make a better man of him. Walpurga left Irma's apartment. Stopping at the door, for an instant, to recover herself, she heard Irma singing again. When she reached her room, she was in a calmer state and said to Zenza:

"Your Thomas will get off; depend upon it. But you must give me your word, and promise to keep it, too, that Thomas will become an honest man, and that you won't help him sell his stolen wares and hide his evil ways. You needn't look at me so, for I've a right to talk to you this way. I've risked a great deal for you."

"Yes, indeed; you've a right to say it," replied Zenza, in a half-earnest, half-jesting tone. "You make our whole neighborhood happy. We're all proud of you. On Sunday, before the church, I'll tell them what influence you have here, and they'll all believe me. Your mother was my playfellow, and if my Thomas had got an honest woman like you for his wife, he'd been thrifty, too. He must get himself a good wife. I'll give him no peace till he does."

Zenza was enjoying some good coffee which Mademoiselle Kramer had prepared for her, and the kind-hearted housekeeper filled her cup again and again.

"If I could only give my son some of this! O how he must be suffering out there! But it serves him right; that's his punishment. He's on the lookout now, but not as a poacher. It's quite a different thing, now." Zenza was quite voluble and Mademoiselle Kramer was charmed with the frankness and motherly affection of the old woman.

When Zenza had emptied her cup and eaten nearly all the cake, she said:

"May I take this little bit of sugar with me? It'll always remind me that I've drunk coffee in the king's palace."

Mademoiselle Kramer wrapped a piece of cake in a paper, and said: "Take this to your son."

It seemed as though Zenza would never get done thanking them. She was in great good humor, and asked permission to see the prince; but Walpurga refused it, and well knew why; for, at home, Zenza was regarded as a witch and, even if it were mere superstition, thought Walpurga, who can know what might happen? She had already become so politic that she availed herself, as an excuse, of the Doctor's order that no stranger should be allowed near the person of the crown prince.

Zenza now told them how great a commotion Walpurga's sudden departure had created in their neighborhood. Ever since, the people would talk of nothing else. The folks were all late at church on Sunday, because they had stopped before Walpurga's house and stared at it as if there was something new to be seen, and Hansei

had been obliged to show his cow to half the congregation, as if there was something strange about it. But the thoughts of all were of Walpurga; and she also said that it was well known that Walpurga's influence had secured Stasi's betrothed his position as ranger. In spite of Walpurga's protestations that she knew nothing of it, Zenza insisted on her story, and praised her the more for her modesty.

The time passed quickly.

Countess Irma, her face radiant with joy, brought the king's letter of pardon.

Zenza would have fallen on her knees to her and kissed her feet, but Irma held her up and said:

"I've something more for you: take this, so that, besides being free, you may be able to get some pleasure."

She gave her a gold piece.

Old Zenza's eyes sparkled, while she said:

"If the gracious princess should ever want any one who'd go through fire and water to serve her, she need only think of Zenza and Thomas."

She would have said much more, but Walpurga said:

"Thomas is waiting for you at the gate; make haste and go to him."

"You see, dear princess, how good she is. She deserves to be happy."

"Walpurga," said Mademoiselle Kramer, "you might give the woman the money for your husband."

"I'll take it for you."

"No, I'll send it. I must wait awhile," said Walpurga, hesitating. She could not well explain that she distrusted both Zenza and her son.

"Here," said Irma, handing Zenza the little golden heart which she wore; "take this to Walpurga's child, from me." Then, removing her silk kerchief, she added, "give her this, too."

"O what a lovely neck!" exclaimed Zenza.

Walpurga again reminded her that she had better return to her son.

Irma felt happy to think that she had brought about the pardon. Walpurga was afraid to tell them Zenza was a stranger to her, and that she almost hated her; or that Red Thomas was one of the worst men in their neighborhood. She consoled herself with the thought that all would yet be well. Bad men can grow better, or else all talk of repentance would be mere lies and deceit.

In the meanwhile, Zenza, holding the pardon on high, had hurried out of the palace.

"Is my reckoning settled?" asked Thomas, spitting as far as he could.

"Yes, thank God! See what a mother can do."

"I do n't owe you much thanks for that, what did you bring me into the world for? But the best of it all is, it's a slap in the face for the great snarling country justice. Now, mother, I'm as thirsty as three bailiff's clerks. Waiting has almost used me up. Have you anything more about you?"

"Of course I have; just look."

She showed him the gold piece, which he most dexterously removed from her hand and into his pocket.

"What else have you got?" said he, when he noticed the little gold heart that she had taken from her pocket at the same time.

"The beautiful princess gave me that and this silk kerchief for Walpurga's child."

"Hansei's child will have enough with the kerchief," said Thomas, appropriating the gold heart, while he goodnaturedly allowed his mother to retain the black cord which had been attached to it.

"There, mother; that'll do very well, and now let's take a drink for having waited so long."

"While I was waiting out here, I saw a splendid rifle at the gunsmith's. You can take it apart and put it in your pocket, and we'll see if the greencoats catch me again."

The first thing young Thomas did was to take the chamois beard and the black cock plume out of his pocket and stick them in his hat again. Then he put on his hat in a defiant manner, and his whole bearing seemed to say: I'd like to see who'd dare touch them.

Just as they were going away, Baum came in from the street. He seemed anxious to avoid them, but Zenza went up to him and thanked him again for the handsome present he had given her when Walpurga had been sent for. She looked at him strangely, and Baum, with a side glance, noticed that Thomas's eyes were fixed upon him. He felt a shudder passing, like a flash of lightning, from his heart to his head. It actually made his hair stand on end, and obliged him to raise his hat and adjust it differently; but he took a nail-file from his pocket and began trimming his nails, and then said: "You've thanked me already; once is enough."

"Mother! if Jangerl was n't in America, I'd have sworn that was he."

"You're crazy," replied Zenza.

They went into the town together. Thomas always walking briskly in front. It seemed as if it would not worry him much, were he to lose his mother.

They repaired to an inn, where, without taking time to sit down, he drank off a schoppen of wine. Then, telling his mother to wait, he went off to purchase the rifle.

Meanwhile, Walpurga was sitting by the window and imagining

how the folks at home would be talking of her great power, and how, at the Chamois, they would have so much to say about her, and that the innkeeper's wife, who had always looked down upon her, would almost burst with envy.

Walpurga laughed and was pleased to think that the envious and proud would be angry at her good fortune. This, indeed, seemed her greatest delight, and, at all events, was the thought on which she dwelt longest. Another reason may have been that the joy of the virtuous is more quickly exhausted than the angry and evil speeches of the wicked, which keep fermenting and sending bubbles to the surface long after they have been uttered. Walpurga remained sitting by the window, her lips silently moving, as if she were repeating to herself the words of those who envied and were angry at her, until, at last, Countess Irma addressed her:

"I can see how happy you are. Yes, Walpurga, if we could only do good to some fellow creature every moment, we would be the happiest beings under the sun. Do n't you see, Walpurga, the real divine grace of a prince lies in his being able to do good at any moment?"

"I understand that quite well," answered Walpurga. "A king is like the sun which shines down on all, and refreshes the trees near by, as well as the flowers in the distant, hidden valley; it does good to men and beasts and everything. Such a king is a messenger from God; but he must be careful to remain one, for, being lord over all, pride and lust may overpower him. He's just given life to Thomas, and all the prison doors open as they do in the fable when they say: '*open sesame.*' O you good king! do n't let them spoil you, and always have such kind-hearted people about you as my Countess Irma."

"Thanks," said Irma. "I now know you perfectly. Believe me, all the books in the world contain nothing better and nothing more than does your heart; and, although you cannot write, it has been so much the more plainly written there.—But let us be quiet and sensible. Come, you must take your writing lesson."

They sat down together, and Irma taught Walpurga how to use the pen. Walpurga said that she did not care to write single letters, and that she would prefer having a word to copy.

Irma wrote the word "pardon" for her. Walpurga filled a whole sheet with that word, and when Irma left the room, she took the writing with her, saying:

"I shall preserve this as a memento of this hour."

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT can be the matter with the queen?"—
—"Her majesty," added Mademoiselle Kramer.

—"What can it be?" said Walpurga; "for some days, the prince—"

"His royal highness," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

"Has hardly been noticed by her. Before that, whenever she saw the child and held it to her heart, she always seemed lifted up to the skies, and once said to me: 'Walpurga, did n't it make you feel as if you'd become a girl again, free and independent of everything? To me, the world is nothing but myself and my child—' and now she hardly looks at it, just as if her having had a child were a dream. There must be great trouble in a mother's heart—"

"Royal mother," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

"—When she does n't care to look at her child."

The queen's heart was, in truth, torn by a mighty struggle. Her feelings had, for months past, been of a most distressing and excited nature. There was one point on which she dared not even think aloud, and which she would have thought profaned by speaking of it to others. It was her wish to determine for herself, and she had done so. Ever since she had become a mother, she had felt as if separated from the rest of the world. When she thought of her child and, above all, when she clasped it to her heart, she felt as if nothing more remained to be done. She and the child were her world; all else was as nothing. And yet she loved the king with all her heart, and ardently desired that their union should be so complete that they might be one in feeling, in belief, and in affection.

The thought that they ought to be united in all things, constantly grew upon her. Father, mother and child should be as one, praying to the same God, with the same thoughts, and in the same words.

The isolation of the sick chamber only helped to strengthen these thoughts and, now that she was about to return to the world, she longed to make the bond that united her to the king, perfect in the highest sense.

She was allowed to do but little talking, and, therefore, did not indulge in conversation. After a few days had passed, she had a Madonna, by Filippo Lippi the younger, brought to her dimly-lighted chamber. She gazed at the picture for hours, and it seemed to be looking at her in return—the two mothers were one in bliss.

The canon visited her and found her in this devotional frame of mind. With trembling lips, she confided to him her desire to belong to the church of her husband and child. He lent a ready assent to the request that she might be spared all dogmatic teachings. When the canon had left, she became oppressed with a sense of fear. There goes a man, thought she, who bears my secret with him. He had promised to keep it to himself and

thus prove himself worthy her confidence. But the secret had, nevertheless, ceased to be entirely her own.

She soon quieted her fears, and a glow of delight overspread her features at the thought that, although she was now a mother, there was yet another sublime and exalted function which would perfect her union with her husband and furnish one more proof of her great love for him.

In the fullness of life, the thought of death occurred to her, and she ordered another painting to be placed on the easel before her. It was the *Maria Ægyptica*, by Ribera.

The queen often felt as if she must seek the glance of the penitent. But those eyes, instead of beholding aught, seem as if listening; not in alarm, for an angel is calling to her—but submissive and trustful, for she is used to the sound of heavenly voices. Instead of representing the penitent daughter of the king as crushed and bruised from having mortified the flesh, the artist has made her features expressive of restored, childlike innocence and youthful beauty—a nude figure, divested of all raiment, wrapped in the long, fair tresses that descend to her knees. She is kneeling beside the open grave that is to receive her. Her blue eyes gaze into eternity; her lips are closed, as if in pain, and above her hovers an angel who spreads the mantle of mercy over her and exclaims: “Thou art forgiven!” Forgiven and redeemed, she sinks into the grave.

The ascetic tone of the picture fully accorded with the queen’s mood, and the canon often found her lost in ecstatic admiration of it.

Although Doctor Gunther disapproved of this mute companionship, his wishes and his orders were alike unavailing. It was the first time that this man, who was so highly esteemed by the queen, had encountered obstinacy and unyielding defiance at her hands. When Irma saw the picture, she carelessly remarked that the position of the eyes was faulty, but that the artist had skillfully availed himself of this fault in order to produce a peculiar expression. The queen pressed her hand to her heart—she was alone in her feelings and wished to remain so.

Walpurga was successful where both Gunther and Irma had failed.

“Is that a forest-sprite?” asked she.

“What’s that?”

“Out our way, they tell of the forest-sprites. They haunt the mountains on ghost-nights, and can wrap themselves in their long hair.”

The queen related the legend of *Maria Ægyptica* to Walpurga. She was a princess who had led a dissolute life. Suddenly, she left the palace and, renouncing all pleasures, went out into the desert, where she supported herself on roots and lived many years,

until all her clothes fell from her body; and, when her dying hour arrived, an angel descended from above and spread the mantle of mercy over her—

"That's all very good and pretty," said Walpurga, "but, no offense to you, my queen, it seems a sin to have such a terrible picture before one's eyes. I would n't want to sleep in the same room with it. It seems as if some night it would come down and drag me into the open grave with it. O dear Lord! I'm afraid of it, even in broad daylight."

Walpurga's words were not without effect. When night came, the queen really imagined that the picture was coming towards her. She could not sleep, and was obliged to have it removed during the night.

Her calmness and equanimity were thus restored, and, as reading was now permitted her, the priest provided her with suitable books.

Her whole life was possessed by the one idea. Walpurga had observed correctly. The queen scarcely looked at her child, although the step she contemplated taking was prompted by love for her husband and her child.

A few days before she went out for the first time, she sent for the king, and said:

"Kurt, next Sunday will be the first time that I go out, and the first day that I enter your church, and that of our son. Henceforth, I shall pray at the same altar with you and him."

"I do n't understand you—"

"I have vowed that if God, in his mercy, would preserve my life and that of the child, I would be united with you in all things. I am not fulfilling an enforced vow, but a free and well-considered resolution. I offer this, not as a new proof, but rather as a confirmation or final sealing of our love. Kurt, my every thought, all that I am, is yours. We are as one before the world; let us be as one before God. Henceforth, we will not take separate ways, or have separate thoughts. Let our child learn nothing of the differences between men, and, above all, between those to whom he owes his life. I feel happy that I can do this as a free offering and not as a sacrifice."

"Mathilde," said the king, with a strangely cold tone, "is this the first time you speak of this, or have you already made preparations—"

"My resolution was formed in secret, and in all earnestness. Afterward, I announced it and all is now in readiness. I had intended it as a surprise for you. The canon almost insisted that I must tell you of it in his presence, but I would n't consent."

"Thank God!" said the king, drawing a long breath, "all may again be well!"

"Again?" "Well?" enquired the queen in amazement.

The king calmly explained to her that, although he appreciated the sacrifice, he could not accept it.

The queen deprecated his terming it a sacrifice, and the king said :

"Very well, then ; you need go no further than myself, who of all beings am most in accord with you, to discover that others may,—nay, must—judge of your actions differently from yourself. What will the world, the courts, our subjects, think of it?"

"What need we care about that, when we know that we are right? 'What will the world say?' is always the great question. But the world must not force us to be different from what we are."

"Mathilde, you speak like a martyr. Your feelings are exalted and worthy of all reverence. You are both good and noble ; but, believe me, the best actions, indeed, the only proper ones, are those which require neither explanation nor apology. We are not hermits. Although your motives are pure and lofty, the world will be unable and unwilling to understand them. Nor dare we make explanations. A prince degrades himself by stooping to explain his actions. You regard the world with heavenly feelings ; but the heaven lies in your way of looking at things, not in the world itself. I should be sorry to reveal the world's wickedness to you, and thus cast a gloom over your kindly views of life. Hold fast to your belief in the Highest, but do it after the forms of your own faith."

"And must I, all my life, walk in one path, while you and the child take another?"

"Mathilde, we are not anchorites ; we are not even private citizens. Our position is an exposed one. A sovereign can have no private actions—"

"Do you mean that all we do is to be as an example to others?"

"I mean that, too," said the king, hesitating ; "but what I meant to say was, that, in whatever you do, it is not yourself alone, but the queen who acts. Its effects are felt far and near. I am happy to be the object of so much love. You feel it, do you not, Mathilde?"

"Do n't speak of it. Our best and deepest feelings do not seek expression in words."

"Bear this well in mind—the wife of a private gentleman can perform such an action in secret. You cannot. You would be obliged to close the Protestant court chapel, and would thus offend all throughout the land who hold your present faith."

"I do n't wish to offend any one. The world can't ask me to make such a sacrifice. My highest, my only aim, is to be one with you, on earth and in heaven, now and hereafter."

"Very well, then ; promise me one thing."

"Whatever you wish."

"Promise me that you will defer acting on your resolve, for at

least a month. It would be wrong to allow a passing mood to change the course of one's life."

"You're a noble creature," said the queen; "I'll obey you."

"So you give up your resolve?"

"No, I shall wait. I do n't wish it to be what you imagine it—the outgrowth of a sickly mood, engendered by the seclusion of my chamber. I'll allow it to ripen in the sunlight, and you will then discover that it is something more than a mere mood."

The king was satisfied with the result. But, strangely enough, he refrained from any display of affection, and when, at parting, he took the queen's hand in his, his manner seemed cold and distant.

CHAPTER IV.

THE king had shown great self-control while conversing with his wife, and, now that he was alone, felt that her words had aroused a dormant feeling of displeasure.

He sincerely loved his wife, but he was of an heroic, active temperament, and all that savored of pettiness, self-questioning or sentimentality, was utterly distasteful to him. His great ambition was to promote the happiness of his subjects, and to achieve for himself a place in history. But a period of peaceful development, in which all were friendly to the government and anxious to serve it, afforded no opportunity for heroic deeds, or for new and startling measures. All that could be done was to hold fast to what had already been achieved and, at the same time, to encourage new growths. But such labors absorb the work of many whose names remain unknown to fame, and it was this that explained the king's fondness for building. The construction of great edifices devoted to art, science, the church and the army, could not but be regarded as proofs of a mind anxious to achieve great deeds.

The king loved his wife, and was content to have it so. The queen, on the other hand, was ever anxious to furnish new proofs of her love, and her deep sensibility was again displayed in this attempt to carry out a resolve which, although prompted by the best motives, was utterly impracticable. She idealized everything, and, in that respect, the king's temperament was the very opposite of hers. Her apartments were always so dimly lighted that, when he entered them, he was obliged to grope his way. On emerging from this gloom, it seemed to him as if the morn had dawned anew, for he dearly loved the bright light of day. This continual worrying about religious problems that none can solve—this constant mental excitement, incapacitates one for prompt action. He who desires to have his life-fabric rest on a firm foundation, must be free from over-refined self-criticism. He must subordinate all his

feelings, all his passions, to the one aim, and to no one does this so forcibly apply as to the monarch who desires to direct the diversified and all-embracing interests of his subjects.

The queen's aim was to realize, in her own person, her ideal of the wife and the mother ; but then she had no right to forget that she was a queen. Something more was required than eternal trifling and weaving of garlands, ingeniously devised as they might be. Love, such as hers, is exacting withal, for, while it lavishes endearments, it constantly requires a return in kind. It is exclusive and, at the same time, wearisome. The sun shines and love exists, but why constantly worry about either.

The lonely life the queen had been leading had produced an excited condition that sought vent in the attempt to change her faith, and, although the king had determined that it should be nothing more than an attempt, her words had tended to confirm a corresponding feeling of loneliness on his part—a result to which his recent experience had in no slight degree contributed.

The king was alone in his cabinet. How would it have stood with him, if his wife had possessed a great and commanding mind ? The thought had suddenly flashed upon him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to banish the idea ; he dared not, could not think of such a thing. He sent for Doctor Gunther, for this affair must be disposed of at once.

Gunther came.

The king, at first, cautiously sounded him, in order to discover whether this confidant of the queen's knew aught of what had happened, and then, under the seal of secrecy, informed him of all.

To the king's great surprise, Gunther, instead of thanking him for this mark of confidence, politely said :

"I should much prefer that Your Majesty had graciously permitted me to remain ignorant of secrets and troubles in which I can be of no assistance."

The king stared at him in astonishment. This man was always obstinate and always preserved his dignity.

"I was about to ask you," said the king, harshly, "whether you believe that you can influence the queen in this matter."

"I fear not ; but if Your Majesty desires it, I am ready to make the effort."

"Pray do."

"But I fear her majesty will be offended. I understand her idiosyncrasies. If the matter is noised about, she will think it profaned by the touch of others, and it will thus, in her opinion, lose its greatest charm."

"That would be the very thing," said the king, eagerly. "Perhaps that will be the best way to cure her of her enthusiasm. Everything is considered a fit subject for debate, nowadays. Your

friends in the chamber of delegates debate everything, and they might as well—”

It was a constant source of annoyance to the king, that the Doctor, who never obtruded his opinions, would, when drawn into an argument on questions of religion or politics, always espouse the liberal side ; but, with all that, he could ill afford to do without Gunther. Although the king found him objectionable in some respects, he nevertheless had a high regard for him. He held so high a position in the world of science and in the esteem of his countrymen, that the presence, near the king, of one possessed of such liberal views, reflected peculiar glory on the court itself.

The king now formally requested Gunther to endeavor to move the queen from her resolve.

It was a difficult undertaking.

The queen had, heretofore, made this trusted friend her confidant, and now he was possessed of a secret of hers that had been given him by another. Gunther endeavored to draw the queen into some allusion to her secret resolve, but, failing in the attempt, was obliged to introduce the subject himself.

The queen seemed surprised and grieved.

“Why has the king done this?” asked she, her features expressing intense pain.

“Perhaps his majesty,” replied Gunther, “credits me with the possession of more powerful arguments than any which have yet been advanced.”

“I know them, all,” answered the queen, excitedly ; “in such a matter, no stranger should dare to breathe a word of—”

“Then, Your Majesty, I’ve nothing more to say, and humbly beg leave to withdraw.”

“No, no ! Speak on—I must hear you.”

“Must ? You must not.”

“Wish, or must, it’s all the same. You’re always saying that there’s no such thing as free will, and with monarchs it is certainly so.”

“Your Majesty,” said Gunther, in a gentle voice, “the high resolve you have formed was not an act of your will. It is the natural and inevitable consequence of a chain of events and impressions, which have been shaped by your temperament. Fervent natures are always afraid lest they cannot do enough for themselves and for the world. They would like, with every hour—nay, with every breath—to make others happy, or impress the world with some great thought.”

“So you, too, can flatter.”

“I never flatter. I simply take the diagnosis which, in your case, is not flattering. This excess of sensibility is not health—”

“So you consider my mood as unhealthy—”

“We should not use that term.—But I entreat you, Your Majesty ! this tone, with either of us, is hardly—”

"Speak on. I like to hear you. I do n't feel hurt that you know of this. I regard you as part of the daylight that was to ripen my resolve."

"Well then, all that is to ripen must needs be subjected to currents of air and even to storms. But I shall bring you no storm, and shall not even speak of the fact that whoever deserts the faith into which he was born, insults his parents; nor shall I tell you that the ceremonies to which we have been accustomed from youth, are the soul's mother-tongue. All that does not address itself to the mind. Mind and reason are the parents of conscious man. It is our duty to live up to our convictions, and I can, therefore, find no fault with a change of religion based upon conviction. But it seems to me, Your Majesty, that your change of faith is simply superficial or, if it be deeper, only from love for your husband. You know, however, that I view all these things from an entirely different standpoint. I believe I know the spring in paradise, whence flows the stream that on earth is divided into so many little rivulets; and these again, to use the words of my friend Eberhard, Countess Irma's father, furnish the power for the mills that grind out sermons. Your Majesty knows that the legend of the four streams that flowed from the tree Igdrasil, which is found in the most beautiful of all books, the Bible, is also to be found in our old German Saga."

"Very well—but, I beg of you, my dear friend, spare me your literary curiosities."

"Your Majesty," resumed Gunther, "as long as we remain in the faith of our fathers, we can enjoy great latitude of opinion. Our thoughts can reach far beyond its confines, and no inquisition has power over us: but, as soon as we profess another religion, we forfeit the right to be free. It is our duty to live up to it. One who is noble by birth can afford to admit civil equality, but he who has had nobility conferred on him, cannot do so. Will Your Majesty permit me to say one word more? I regard it as fortunate for mankind in general, and our German fatherland in particular, that there is a diversity of religious beliefs. That of itself tends to preserve feelings of humanity, for thus we cannot help seeing that there are different forms of soul utterances for one and the same thing. A multiplicity of sects affords the best protection against fanaticism and, moreover, helps to prove that religious forms are of no consequence; that is, one can be righteous in any faith and, indeed, without any outward show of religion."

Gunther remained with the queen for a long while, offering further explanations of the ideas he had advanced.

He was still with her, when the canon was announced.

The queen sent word that she desired to be excused, and requested him to come the next day.

When Gunther left, she was still as firm in her resolve as at

first. She felt persuaded that this was an action in which no other being should interfere and, least of all, a man.

She was on the point of taking Irma into her confidence. She felt that the Countess was clever and, moreover, a true friend. Unconquerable dread held her back. She feared lest she might appear weak and vacillating in Irma's eyes.

CHAPTER V.

FOR days, the queen remained alone. Walpurga and the child were the only ones permitted near her. She did not wish to speak to any one else, be it her husband, Gunther, or the priest.

One afternoon, when Walpurga was with her, she felt impelled to ask :

"Walpurga, do you know that I do n't belong to your faith ?"

"Yes, indeed, I do ; and I'm glad of it."

"Glad of it ?"

"Of course I am ; you're the first and only Lutheran I've ever known, and if they're all like you, it must be a beautiful religion."

"It is beautiful, and so are all religions that make good beings of us."

"Why, do you know, queen, that's the very thing my father used to say, and in the very same words? O, if he'd only lived long enough to have had a talk with you."

The queen was silent for a long while.

At last she asked :

"Walpurga, if your religion was different from Hansei's, would you go to his church ?"

"Why, Hansei's Catholic, as well as I am."

"But if it were otherwise ?"

"But it is n't otherwise."

"But just imagine it were."

"But I can't do that," said she, as if about to cry.

The queen was again silent for some time. Presently Walpurga, of her own accord, said :

"Yes, I can, after all. I've thought it out. Why you're Lutheran and your husband's Catholic. But why do you ask me that ?"

"Imagine yourself in my position. If you were a Protestant, would you not visit your husband's church ?"

"No, queen, never ! As long as I'd been an honest wife while a Protestant, I'd remain one. May I tell you a little story, queen ?"

"Yes ; go on."

"What was I going to say ?—Yes, now I know.—You see, my dear father—the king's physician has surely told you what a good man he was— But I'm beginning at the wrong end ; I wanted to

tell it to you differently.—Well, as I was going to say, I went to school to a very strict priest who condemned all people that did not belong to our faith, to the lowest depths of hell. I was once telling my father about it, when he said: ‘Purgei,’—he always called me Purgei when he wanted to speak right to my heart—‘Purgei,’ said he, ‘there are many millions of people in the world, and the smallest portion of them are Christians, and what a vile God it would be who would condemn all the rest to hell just because they are not Christians, when they can’t help it, and were born as they are. Do not you believe,’ said he, ‘that a man’s damned for his faith, as long as he’s virtuous.’ Well, I hold fast by that. Of course, I did not say anything to the priest about it, for he need not know everything. I’m sure he does not tell me all he knows.”

The queen was silent, and Walpurga soon began again:

“And now I think of something, better than all. O, my dear queen, I must tell you this, too. It’s about my father, who used to think a great deal. The old doctor, the father of the one who’s living there now, often used to say that if father had studied, he’d have become a great man. Well, one evening, on the very Sunday that I was confirmed, I was sitting with father and mother on the bench behind our little cottage by the lake. The evening bells were tolling; we had said our aves and were sitting about in front of the cottage, when we heard the Liederkrantz. They were coming across the lake in a boat, and were singing so beautifully—I can’t tell you how lovely their singing was. And then father got up from his seat, his face glowing in the sunshine, and said: ‘now I know how our Lord in heaven must feel.’ ‘Do not blaspheme,’ said my mother. ‘I’m not blaspheming; quite the reverse,’ said father. His voice seemed wondrous strange. ‘Yes, I know it, I feel it,’ said he; ‘all churches—our own, the Protestant, the Jewish, the Turkish, and whatever their names may be—every one of them has a part in the song, and though each sings as best he can, they go together very well, and make a chorus that must sound glorious up there in heaven. Let every one sing according to the voice God has given him, for He will know how it will harmonize, and it surely does harmonize beautifully.’”

Walpurga’s beaming glance met that of the queen.

“Your father spoke wisely,” said the queen; a tear glistened in her eye and in that of the nurse, too.

Walpurga went away, taking the child with her.

The next day the queen sent for the king, and said:

“Kurt, I have courage.”

“I know it.”

“No. I have a courage that you do not know.”

“A courage that I do not know?”

“And never will know. I have courage enough to appear weak

and vacillating; but, Kurt, you will not misjudge me on that account?"

"Pray speak more plainly, and with fewer preliminaries."

"I am determined," continued the queen, "I hardly dare utter that word, now—but you will not misjudge me? I shall remain in the faith in which I was born, and we shall nevertheless be as one."

The king thanked her quite cordially, and only regretted that the canon knew of the matter. He hoped, however, to be able to silence his tongue.

The queen was surprised to find that he manifested so little joy; but, on second thought, this seemed quite natural to her, for why should that which had been nothing more than a passing cloud, leave great results in its wake? Others could know nothing of the bitter struggle it had cost her.

She felt sensible that it would be a long while before any expression or resolve of hers would obtain weight or authority, for it would not soon be forgotten that she had once shown herself weak.

While she was in the Protestant court chapel, on the following Sunday, she scarcely ventured to raise her eyes. She was thinking of how it would have been if she now were in the other church, and of how the eyes of the congregation would have been directed to the pew that was thenceforward to remain vacant. In spirit, she had already deserted this church and its congregation. Her soul trembled when she thought of the resolve she had entertained, and, from the bottom of her heart, she thanked her husband, whose strong arm had held her back.

When the whole congregation arose and, in the prayers for the royal household, offered up thanks for her preservation and that of the royal prince, she could no longer restrain her tears.

Contrary to her usual habit, she went to church again that afternoon.

Meanwhile, the king and Countess Irma were pleasantly sauntering in that portion of the park from which the public was shut out.

The king informed Irma of the queen's resolve and of how she had been induced to give it up. Irma replied that she had, long since, surmised as much, but had not felt that she had a right to speak of it. She had dropped a hint to Doctor Gunther, who had refused to have anything to do with the matter.

The king expressed his dislike for Gunther, but Irma defended him with great enthusiasm.

"The Doctor is very fortunate," said the king, "to have so eloquent an advocate in his absence."

"I am that to all friends whom I truly respect."

"I could wish that I, too, were accused," continued the king.

"And I believe," replied Irma, smiling, "Your Majesty could not wish for a more earnest advocate than I would be."

A pause ensued. The king gracefully and frankly retracted his

complaints against Gunther, and this conversation seemed merely a bridge over which they passed to another topic.

The king spoke of the queen and of her peculiar temperament.

It was the first time that the king and Irma had spoken of the queen. That the king not only prompted, but actually called forth her remarks, was the cause, at a later day, of incalculable suffering.

They extolled the poetic sense, the fervent feeling, the flower-like tenderness of the queen, and while they thus depicted her in glowing colors, they, in their own minds, found fault with her weakness and overflowing enthusiasm.

When a husband thus speaks of his wife, to a third person, it inevitably leads to estrangement and exposure.

Thus far, all was veiled in terms of praise. It was here just as it was with the queen in church. With all the power of her will, she strove to forget herself in her prayer, and to be again as she had once been; and yet, while the sense of the words she uttered entered her soul, she could not help being aware of a secret numbness and estrangement that seemed to say to her: "You will never again be as you once were."

While the king and Irma were thus conversing, they appeared to each other as equals. Their views of life were in accord, and while they spoke of how easily one might yield to temptation, their intimacy seemed to them a proof of strength rather than of weakness. They went on, in perfect step with each other, and Irma no longer said: "Let us return."

The queen, since she had again appeared in society, was, if possible, more gracious and amiable than she had ever been. She placed every one far above her. They had none of them been as weak and vacillating as she. She felt it her duty to do good to every one, because, although she was no better than they, she was placed far above them. Her soul was all humility.

A few days later, the newspapers mysteriously hinted that attempts had been made to take advantage of the angelic purity of the queen, in order to estrange her from herself and alienate the affections of the people from her.

This, it was readily understood, alluded to the queen's contemplated change of faith.

The queen had always openly acknowledged herself on the side of the liberal opposition, and the king regarded Gunther as the mediator who had procured her the goodwill of the press, and who, in doing so, had not feared committing an indiscretion.

This plain and flagrant perversion of the truth only served the more to embitter him against the press and the machinations of the queen's party at court. Nevertheless, he dissembled his resentment, for he felt that he could well afford to bide his time.

CHAPTER VI.

(IRMA TO HER FRIEND EMMA.)

“LET me tell you all that I did yesterday. I wanted to read—I saw the letters but could not read a word, for they all seemed to be moving about the page, like so many ants in an ant-hill. I wanted to sing, but no song was to my liking. I wanted to play, but even Beethoven seemed strange, and I lay for hours, dreaming. I followed the little mother and her son beyond the mountain. The larks sang my thoughts to them. They reach their home, and the wild, daring lad is tractable once more. He carols his merry song to his beloved. I fancy I hear him. Ah, Emma! what is there so glorious as making others happy? It is hard enough to be a human being, fettered by a thousand trammels, by ailments, consideration for others, and all sorts of misery; but to suffer want beside! The very idea of jails is a disgrace to humanity. Ah, Emma! how noble, how like a revelation from the great heart of the people, were the words of the simple-minded wife of the woodcutter. I tried to put what she had said into verse, intending to give it to the king the next morning; but I could not do it; nothing satisfied me. Language is worn out, narrow coarse. I was ever thinking of Schiller’s words: ‘When the soul speaks, it has ceased to be the soul.’ I left my scribbling. I passed a restless night. When the soul’s depths are stirred, it wanders about like a spirit, and can find no rest in sleep.

“While at breakfast this morning, I informed the king of what Walpurga had said. I was annoyed to find that he did not understand more than half of it. How else could he have answered me: ‘Yes, the Highlanders have great affection for their rulers. Pray tell that to your father.’

“The king observed that he had made a mistake, but, adroit and amiable as he is, quickly recovered his good nature and said: ‘Dear Countess, I will give you a secret title, which is to be known only by us two. I appoint you as spy on the popular heart. Seek and listen, and whenever you find anything, you can always count upon unquestioning compliance on my part. Does it not seem to you that Egeria was nothing more than a spy on the popular heart? At the altar in the temple, she could overhear the secret thoughts of the people, and then repeated them to king Numa, whom they deified and adored.’

“‘But our people only use prescribed prayers,’ said I.

“‘The thought is quite suggestive,’ replied the king, and when Schnabelsdorf entered shortly afterward, he commissioned him to make brief notes of what fixed prayers the Grecians and Romans used in their temples.

“And thus the whole story ended. What I had imagined would

create a deep impression, merely served to furnish amusement for an evening.

"Ah, dear Emma, *amusement* is the point about which all revolves. If an apostle were to appear to-day, he could not help preaching, 'Ask not, how shall we amuse ourselves to-day, but'—etc., etc.,—finish the sentence for yourself.

"I am no better than the rest of them. I, too, am nothing but a puppet, wound up to run seventy years, and to dance and laugh and ride and amuse itself in the meanwhile. All of us are mere singing-birds; the only difference being that some are contented with grain and caterpillars and flies, while others require larger morsels, such as rabbits, bucks, deer, pheasants, fish. And the higher education of that variety of singing-birds known as man, lies in the fact that he cooks his food. There is terrible vacuity in many men. *To make conversation*. Therein lies the whole art. Try to get a clear notion of the expression: *to make conversation*, and you will find how nonsensical it is. The people find me entertaining, but I do n't *make* conversation. I merely speak when I have somewhat to say.

"My evil spirit is constantly shouting the word '*dilettante*' in my ear.

"'*Dilettante*—One who junkets or feeds on tit-bits for pastime,'—says my dictionary. Rather rough, but there is something in it."

"*One day later.*

"The king has just sent me the following poem. I must apologize to him; he seems to have understood my communication far better than I had suspected. What do you think of the lines? Why should a king not write verses? Ideality is required of him. Indeed a king should understand all things, but be a *dilettante* in none.

"P. S.—I have just looked at the lines again, and find that I cannot copy them for you."

"*A day later.*

"Do n't laugh at my continually telling you of Walpurga.

"It was during our writing lesson to-day, that the king found me with her. He told her how much pleasure it had afforded him to be able to pardon her relative.

"'Our relationship is very distant,' said she, 'nothing more than forty-second cousins; and, Your Majesty, I've something on my mind. If Red Thomas turns out badly, I can't help it.'

"The king laughed and replied: 'Nor can I.' It is hard to understand how Walpurga never speaks of Zenza and her son except in anger, and that she will have nothing to do with them. Strange demons jostle each other in the hearts of the people. I fear that my office of spy on the popular heart will prove very difficult.

"By the king's orders, I have been furnished with a copy of the church prayers of the Greeks and Romans.

"I must write it down and then the idea will cease tormenting me. I am constantly picturing to myself, how would it have been if Zenza had become first lady of the bedchamber, and her son the poacher, master of the hounds. She would be ready enough of speech. She has exceedingly clever and cunning eyes, and the lad would surely have been an elegant cavalier.

"In spite of all their prating about human equality and pride of birth, I cannot help regarding it as a sign of divine grace, that I was born a countess, instead of Zenza's daughter; but there are two sides to that question.

"God's creatures are not so badly off in this world, after all. The frog croaking in the marsh is just as happy as the nightingale that sings on the tree.

"To say to the frog, 'Thou, too, should'st dwell in the rosebush and sing like the nightingale,' were not humane, but simply tyrannical.

"Have you ever patiently listened to the croaking of the frogs? How expressive it is of comfort! While I write, they are having a grand concert over in the park pond. I enjoy listening to them. We human beings are impudent enough to judge everything by the standard of our own taste, and yet Mistress Frog will, very justly, find no music so sweet to her ears as the song of Master Frog.

"I feel so grateful, dear Emma, that I can write everything to you. You cannot imagine what a relief it is to me.

"I am a spy on my own heart; there are many wild spirits in it—adventurers and fortune hunters and, with them all, a nun. I am quite curious to know how so mixed a company will get on together.

"My behavior towards the whole court is so free and independent, because I have a secret daily task: writing to you.

"But my thoughts go out to you a thousand times oftener:

There's not an hour in the silent night,
But what my thoughts go out to thee.

"Do you remember it? It was your favorite song. I sing it, for your sake, at least once every day. You and my piano are all in all to me. You patiently await my coming. All the music of all the masters that ever were, or ever will be, dwells within you, and you only await the coming of the one whose touch can release those tones.

"I have a dual soul. In its one phase, the piano—in its other, the zither. The one is easily moved from place to place; the other not. The one requires that the fingers touch the strings. But ah, dear Emma, I scarce know what I am writing. I wish I could get rid of the habit of thinking. I wish I were Zenza's daughter and the poacher were my brother. But no; our thieves and

rogues who have been at school long enough to know the seven cardinal sins and the whole of the catechism by heart, are timid and cowardly; they drop the petition for pardon into their mother's lap, while they stand by whining: Forgive us, we have done nothing wrong. All the world over, there is no longer genuine scorn of nature. Methinks the 'Italian robber behind the rock' that you once worked in wools, has, in these days, ceased to be more than a traditional pattern for embroidery. The arts simply serve to gloss over life.

"Good night—good night."

"A day later.

"I never read what I have once written. I do not care to be reminded of it again. Yesterday's sun does not shine to-day.—But that was not what I meant. The sun is the same, but the light is ever new, and I am happy to-day and do not care for all the churches and palaces, men and women, frogs and crocodiles in the world.

"To-day, the king said to me:

"'I am well aware, Countess, that you have thought contemptuously of me, during the last two days. Every withdrawal of your sympathy affects me as sensibly as if it were an electric shock. Do not let this happen again, I beg of you!' and while he spoke, he looked at me like a beseeching child. Ah, he has such deep, beautiful eyes!

"I remember your once saying to me: 'There are glances without a background, void of depth or soul;' but the glances of this friend have unfathomed depths.

"The bonds that held me captive shall no longer restrain me! I—I—but no—I cannot write the word.

"Oh Emma! How I wish I were a peasant on a lonely mountain height. Last night, it seemed to me as if my native mountains were calling out to me, 'Come home'—'Do come'—'It is good to be with us.' Ah, I would like to come, but cannot.

"Walpurga is a great friend to me at present. I become absorbed in her life, so full of true, natural repose. I find it excessively amusing to behold the court as reflected through her eyes. It seems like a very puppet-play, and we, like two merry children at a raree-show.

"We often sing together, and I have learned some lovely songs from her. O how charmingly independent the country people are.

"'On mountain heights there dwells no sin.' The song is ever haunting me.

"The king departs for the baths to-day; my brother is in his suite. The king requested me to write to him, now and then. I shall not do it."

"Two days later.

"The king knows that I cannot live unless there be flowers in

my room, and has given orders to have a fresh bouquet placed there every day. This displeases me. A flower that a friend has stooped to pluck for you is worth more than a thousand artistically arranged bouquets.

"The king has also left orders that bouquets shall be sent daily to Baroness N—— and Countess A——. I think this is only to avoid remarks upon the attention shown me. I am angry at the king. He shall not have a line from me.

"I have, for some time past been taking lessons in modeling, from a professor at the academy. He has finished a bust of me, and has used it as a model for a figure of Victory, to be placed on the new arsenal. Have I not reason to be proud? After this, I shall ever be in the open air, and shall see nothing but the blue sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and, at noon, the guard-mounting.

"The professor says that I have talent for modeling. This has made me quite happy. Painting and drawing are only half the battle—mere makeshifts. Will you permit me, on my return, to make a *relievo* of you?

"Did I not, in one of my letters to you, speak of a secret in regard to the queen?

"I think I did.

"The affair is now at an end. For love of the king, the queen wished to enter our church, or rather yours—pardon me, once and for all time, I have no church. The king behaved nobly in the matter. I shall never forget the time he told me of it. He is, indeed, a great man. How glorious it is, that there are princes on earth who realize our ideal of the perfect man. Free and yet self-possessed, unspoiled, unperverted and unbiassed. If there were no kings, we could no longer know a free, beautiful, perfect man. I use the word *beautiful* in its highest sense, and of course presuppose the existence of a noble mind. All are not gods who suffer themselves to be worshiped.

"The poet and the king are, of all men, alone perfect. All others—be they musicians or painters, sculptors or architects, artists or scholars—have narrow, contracted vocations, solo instruments, as it were. The poet and the king are the only ones who grasp life in all its phases. To them, naught is void of meaning, because all belongs to them. The poet creates a world; the king is a world in himself. The poet knows and depicts the shepherd and the huntsman, the king and the waitingmaid, the seamstress—in fact, all. But the king is hunter and statesman, soldier and farmer, scholar and artist, all in himself. He represents the orchestra of talents. Thus is he king, and thus does he represent a people, an age—aye, humanity itself, and at its best.

"Ah, Emma! Call me Turandot. Schoning, the poetic chamberlain, is also paying his addresses to me.

"Do you know what I ought to have been?

"I do.

"Queen of a tribe of savages. That is what I was created for. My true vocation would be to found a new civilization. Do n't laugh at me. I am not joking; indeed, I'm not. I am fit for something far better than all I have here. I am not modest. I judge others and myself, too. I know my merits and my faults, also.

"On father's estate, there is a hammock that hangs between two elms. My greatest pleasure was to lie in it, suspended in the air, while I dreamt of distant worlds.

"Do you know some savage tribe that would elect me as its queen? I have procured some of the Indian melodies, if they really deserve the name. One of the professors at the university, who spent six years among the Indians, recently gave a lecture at court. He brought some of their instruments with him, and had them played on. There was more noise than music. It seemed like the lisping of a nation which, as regards civilization, is yet in its infancy."

"Four o'clock in the morning.

"Forget all that I have written to you, as you would the breezes and the weather-changes of yesterday.

"I have just left my bed, in order to write to you. I cannot sleep. I am scarcely dressed while I sit here speaking to you. Oh! that I *could* speak to you! Writing is a miserable makeshift—nay, helplessness itself.

"I do n't know what ails me. All that I am—my very self—seems as if only for the time being. I feel as if waiting for something, I know not what. I fancy that the very next moment must bring it, and that I shall either be doing some wonderful thing, or have it happen to me—that I shall be completely changed and become a great healing power, instead of the puny, useless child of man that I now am. I listen and fancy that I must hear a tone that has never yet been uttered on earth.

"There is no use trying—I cannot write. I imagined that it would soothe me if I could force myself to think and speak of all things in definite terms, but I know nothing definite. I only know that I am unhappy. Not unhappy, but as if dead and yet alive. I imagine myself a sleep-walker.

"I can write no more. I close my letter and shall go to bed. I want to sleep. All the world about me lies hushed in slumber. Oh, that I could dream myself into another world, even though my sleep were one from which there is no waking!

"Good night! Good morning!

' IRMA.'

CHAPTER VII.

"**T**OMORROW, I mean to bring Countess Irma to you," said Doctor Gunther to his wife, one evening. "She's the daughter of my old friend."

"In voice and manner, the Countess is full of majesty, but her singing is not practical."

"Then you shall teach her. She will be glad to learn from you."

"If she be willing, I am quite at her service."

The Doctor was delighted to find it so easy to bring the two ladies together. He knew, of course, that his wife complied with his every wish, but in this instance he was doubly anxious that all should go smoothly.

For some time past, he had observed that Irma was in a feverish condition which, during the last few days, had been growing worse; but he was one of those physicians who pay great attention to mental conditions and, instead of waiting for disease to make its appearance, endeavor to avert it by proper changes in the mode of living. He did not know the cause of Irma's excitement, but he knew that her temperament was one of extremes, and felt sure that if she could only obtain an insight into a pure home and, perhaps, become initiated into its ways, it would have a tranquilizing effect and lead her mind to move in quieter channels. He had enough experience to know that there are no substitutes for sympathy and friendship, but felt that the acquaintance of a citizen's wife, of exalted character and ripe culture, could not fail to have an effect upon Irma, who had thus far known no life but that of the cloister and the court.

Gunther had no need to give his wife instructions, or even a mere hint as to the way in which she was to endeavor to gain an influence over Irma. He felt as sure of his wife's course in the matter as if she were a force in nature, and well knew that, if left to her own methods, the result would be so much the more certain.

Gunther usually kept his household free from all relations with the court; but this was the daughter of his friend—although that friend was angry at him—and he allowed her the freedom of his house.

Some weeks before, when speaking of the *Te Deum* on the occasion of the birth of the crown prince, Irma had casually referred to her having met Gunther's wife and youngest daughter. The Doctor had again, as if by the merest chance, introduced the subject and, almost without knowing it, Irma had expressed a wish to improve the slight acquaintance thus begun. This was just what he had wished for and, on the afternoon of the day following, he conducted Irma to his beautiful, well-furnished home.

Gunther's wife was Swiss by birth, and had come from a wealthy and cultured family. She spoke High German with a strong Alemannic accent. She endeavored neither to retain the dialect nor to acquire the language of books. Her easy, natural ways seemed the result of careful culture, but there was no attempt to show off either. As a matter of course, she was perfectly conversant with all that related to the economy of the household, and at the same time fully alive to all that makes for beauty and the common weal.

As a singer, Madame Gunther had been a great favorite, both in social circles and at important vocal performances. Her voice was a full, resonant soprano and, although she had given up singing solos, she and her daughters would still take part when great musical works were performed. When fresher voices had taken the solo parts, she had, without a murmur of regret, retired to her place in the chorus.

And thus, too, was her life. Self-reliant and diligent at home, she took an active interest in all public institutions in which women were permitted to take part. She had preserved one priceless heirloom—she was free from nervousness and, with her, public spirit was a duty. She educated her children, managed her household, was a kind and attentive hostess, and performed all this as if obeying the simple instincts of her nature.

She honored her husband. Whatever he said was always of special weight, but still she held fast to her own judgment. Although she had been living in the capital for nearly twenty years, she had remained a stranger to the whole of the hodge-podge system of caste and the granting of favors by the grace of this or that one. She was not opposed to the system, but she left such matters to those in whose eyes they possessed value and importance; as for herself, she regarded them with absolute indifference.

She was pleased at the honors shown her husband, but that seemed, to her, a matter of course. He was a great man, and if the world had withheld its praise, he would, in her eyes, still have been the greatest and best of men. Her whole bearing expressed this feeling. She had never had the slightest desire to appear at court, and when her husband was obliged to be away from home by day or at night, and often for weeks at a time, she accepted his absence as unavoidably incident to his calling, and refrained from adding to his discomfort by complaining thereat.

When the Doctor returned, it was always to a well-ordered home. Refreshed and invigorated by its influence, he would go back to the smooth and slippery precincts of the court.

Irma was now introduced to this home. In appearance, she was all beauty and dignity, and no one would have guessed how forlorn and homeless she felt within her heart. In her hand, she held the bouquet which had, as usual, been sent to her that day, by the

king's orders. Gunther had told her that this was his daughter Paula's birthday, and she had brought the flowers for her. They were as lovely as she who brought them. And yet what was it that clung to them? It was almost sinful to use the bouquet as a birthday favor, for Irma felt mortified when she received it. But the flowers were as coin that might be passed on to another.

When Irma entered the house, she felt as if escaping from the noise and bustle of the market-place, or the restless life and cries of the highway, into a temple of domestic peace.

The house was on a little, narrow street, and was surrounded by a garden full of tall, fine trees. A portion of the yard had been fenced off and converted into an aviary. The hallway and rooms were adorned with statuettes and pictures; the furniture was simple and massive. The Doctor's library, reception-room and study were in the upper story.

There had been no preparations of any kind for Irma's reception. The mother had carefully enjoined her daughters not to make any change in their dress on account of the Countess's visit. They did not go out to meet her. She was conducted through the summer-house, where the flowers and presents for Paula had been arranged, and there, on the steps, sat Madame Gunther and her daughters, busily engaged in needle-work. The elder daughter, the wife of Professor Korn of the university, had her child with her. Paula, the younger of the two, who, like Irma, had just entered her twenty-first year, could not be termed beautiful, but had a bright and cheerful countenance and a fine figure.

Irma was warmly welcomed. As it was Gunther's hour for consultation, he soon retired and left her with the ladies. She was surprised, at first, to find herself repeatedly accosted as the daughter of an old friend. She was not here on her own merit, or as the most admired of all the ladies at court, but simply as Count Eberhard's daughter, who had been received into the house from an affectionate sense of duty. When asked about her father's health, she thanked them, although she felt sad at heart to think that she knew so little of him. How utterly different from hers was the life these children led.

Music soon afforded a convenient and agreeable change. On the piano, there lay a composition in manuscript. It was by a nephew of Madame Gunther's, who lived in northern Germany. Madame Gunther told her that he was a philologist by profession, but that, as he would, in all likelihood, lose his eyesight, he had determined to cultivate his decided musical gifts and to perfect himself as a musician.

Irma begged Madame Gunther to sing the song, but she replied that, while her voice was no longer equal to it, that of the Countess was exactly suited to it. She gave the manuscript to Irma, who read it over and afterwards sang it with rich, full voice, to

Madame Gunther's accompaniment. The composition was pleasing, but full of suggestions of well-known masters.

Madame Gunther now showed what she meant by practical singing. Irma did not make the best use of the means at her command, and where there were faults showed them too plainly. The Doctor's wife instructed her in a simple, unpretentious manner, and Irma remarked that the daughters ought to feel happy to think that they could ~~here~~ such singing every day. *here*

"And this is my son, the most grateful of all listeners," said Madame Gunther, introducing a handsome young man with a full, brown beard. He was technical director in a manufactory of chemicals, and had brought a student with him. Female friends who lived in the neighborhood joined them soon afterward and there were merry times on the terrace and in the garden.

Irma remarked the attentive glances directed upon her. It seemed to her as if all knew the troubles that filled her soul; she had completely forgotten how beautiful she was.

"Pardon me, Madame Gunther, for looking at you so," said Irma, suddenly, "but I am somewhat of a dabbler in plastic art, and when I notice the contour and color of your head, it seems as if the Holbein Madonna, of the Dresden Gallery, had come to life and was standing before me."

"Can you really see the resemblance, at this late day?" asked Madame Gunther, blushing slightly; "in former days, it was often remarked and was almost the very first thing my husband said to me in Zurich, now well nigh twenty-six years ago. On my mother's side I can trace my descent from the family of Burgo-master Maier, by whose orders the picture was originally painted."

Irma was delighted with all that she heard and saw, and especially with Madame Gunther's reminiscences. While speaking of her own efforts in the way of art, she looked at the Doctor's wife earnestly, and only wished she were able to model a portrait, in which case Madame Gunther would have to sit to her. She could not help thinking, at the same time, that there was a culture which had been handed down from earliest times: a culture whose history, running through all ages, is entirely different from that of the nobility, and that the best results of human effort had been brought about, not by the nobles, but by civic liberty.

Madame Gunther asked Irma whether she had a picture of her mother.

Irma replied that her father had had a portrait taken of her mother when in the fullness of her beauty. The picture had been a failure, and almost seemed as if intended for some one else, and so her father had ordered it to be destroyed. He would rather have no picture than a false one.

"That, of itself, is enough to make one honor him for his love of truth," said Madame Gunther. "Most people are satisfied with

what is false, and keep on saying: 'you can recognize this or that feature,' until they, at last, persuade themselves that it must once have been a true likeness."

The conversation now turned upon the fact that Irma had never known her mother, and Irma's glance often dwelt upon the two daughters sitting beside their mother.

Madame Gunther said:

"I trust that I've not awakened painful memories, but I regard it as a duty that we should often think of our beloved dead; calmly and peacefully, of course. I've always felt thus with regard to my departed mother, and I hope that, when the time comes, my children may have the same feelings toward me."

Irma pressed Madame Gunther's hand. All that she said was so full of truth, so satisfying.

Madame Gunther told her that it was long before she had acquired a taste for plastic art. Appreciation had, however, gradually dawned upon her; but it was for what related to the human figure, rather than for landscapes. The conversation continued in an easy and cheerful vein. The carriage had long ago been announced; the half-hour which Irma had meant to stay with Madame Gunther had been prolonged to more than an hour. At last, she took her leave with sincere requests to repeat her visit.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Irma returned to the palace, she felt as if coming from another world—from a life far removed from her own.

Gunther was a deep student of the human heart.

In one respect, Irma's visit had had the result foreseen by him; but there was some unknown influence at work, and, perhaps, affecting previously existing conditions. Nothing, unless it be the drop that falls from the cloud, is free from foreign admixture, and it is from pure thought alone that one can draw definite conclusions. The water in the spring, and the living human heart, both contain foreign elements within themselves, and no one can foretell how a new ingredient may affect the invisible atoms thus held in solution.

Irma's soul was deeply agitated. Her great power had been exercised and had sought some act in which to spend itself. She had felt happy in the possession of the king's friendship and in the thought that she could furnish so great a mind as his with the congenial companionship he would otherwise be obliged to forego; but the daily bouquet, trivial attention as it was, had aroused and offended her. "He is n't my ideal," said she to herself and her heart felt lonely again, as it had been ever since she was old enough to think.

Although she had been lonely while at the cloister, she had

there found a friend who, if she had little to impart, gratefully accepted all that Irma could give her. At the court, she felt lonely in spite of her wanton humors. She was always obliged to be doing something, be it playing, singing, painting or modeling; anything but this death-like solitude. She was suffering the homesickness of the soul.

"Are not all in this world homeless?" she asked herself, and, while searching her mind for an answer, Gunther had introduced her to his household.

There, all seemed beautiful and complete. There was a home, and a mother who showed that she understood a young and ardent life; the daughters would never suffer as she did. The mother's glance fell upon her and seemed to say: "I shall understand you and will soothe all sorrows you may tell me of." But Irma could not complain, nor exclaim: "Help me!"—and where nothing was required of her, least of all. She could and must help herself.

Madame Gunther had touched her most tender chord: the memory of her mother and, although Irma gently avoided the subject, her pain was so much the greater.

She wept, but did not know it until a tear dropped on her bosom.

There is so much comfort, so much of real and beautiful seclusion, in a world which is content with itself, and which, in its work and education, requires no favors from those above. How happy the lot of a daughter in such a home, until she, in turn, becomes the head of another household.

Irma felt humbled. All her pride had left her. Her thoughts were still in the garden, where the people moved about in careless unconstraint and where the men, returning from their professional labors, and the maidens, from their domestic duties, were enjoying themselves in common.

"One thing yet remains mine and it is the best," exclaimed Irma, suddenly rising; "solitude is mine. I can yet be lonely, strong, self-contained."

Her waitingmaid entered and announced a lackey sent by the queen.

"Does the queen want to see me at once?"

"Yes, gracious Countess."

"Very well, I'll be there directly."

"Walpurga was right, after all," said she to herself; "I, too, serve."

She felt vexed while she stood before the mirror to have her dress adjusted. She assumed a cheerful expression with which to appear before the queen. She was obliged to do so.

She hastened to obey the queen's orders. When she got near the door, she drew herself up and again fixed her features in the cheerful, smiling expression that she wished them to have and then entered the room, which, as usual, was dimly lighted.

The queen was sitting in a large armchair. She was clad in a dress of snowy white, and a lace handkerchief had been twined about her golden hair.

"Come nearer, dear Countess," said the queen. "I am delighted to see you again. When I see my dear friends, it seems as if I'd been spending the last few weeks in another world. Unfortunately, I am somewhat indisposed, again. I owe you special thanks, for I understand that you've kindly interested yourself in the nurse; by keeping her cheerful, you do the prince a service. The king quite agrees with me that you're a real treasure to us. I shall write as much to your father and tell him how happy we are to have you with us. That will surely put him in a better humor with you."

Irma was glad that the queen had so much to say, for she was thus enabled to recover her composure.

"Pray give me the letter that lies on the table," said the queen.

Irma brought it and the queen added:

"Just read these lines of the king's."

Irma read: "Pray tell Countess Irma to keep me constantly informed as to the condition of our son. Remember me to the dear fourth petal of our clover-leaf."

Irma returned the letter with thanks. She felt deeply humiliated to think that the king was trying to force her to write, and at the method he had chosen. Walpurga was right when she spoke of love-glances at the cradle.

Irma almost fainted with grief and shame.

"Won't you do us the favor to write, dear Countess?"

Irma bowed deeply, and the queen continued:

"Of course there will be very little to write about. Man is the highest object in creation and, for that very reason, develops far more slowly than all other creatures."

Irma was about to suggest that, at that rate, a prince would develop still more slowly, but she merely nodded and smiled assent.

She was not in a mood to enter into the queen's way of thinking. She could see nothing in her but nursery thoughts, with which, at present, she had no sympathy. Though they were vastly more important, what would it matter to me, thought she to herself. Here, just as in Gunther's house, there is a life separate from the world and contented with itself. Here is a mother and her child. Of what use am I? Merely to talk and take part in everything. All others are complete and possess a world of their own; and am I always only to take a part—there, the alms bestowed by friendship; here, those accorded me by royal grace? Am I complete in myself, or am I not?

And while Irma's mind was filled with these thoughts, the queen, in her agitated, soulful manner, went on to say:

"The miracle of life fills me with awe. Have you never thought of the world of meaning suggested by the idea of a child drawing its first breath and opening its eyes for the first time? Air and light are earth's first and last messengers; the first breath and the last; the first glance and the last. How wonderful!"

Irma now felt what it was to serve. Had she been free, and on an equal footing with the one who addressed her, she would have said: "My dear friend, I am not in the mood, just now, to enter into what you are saying. Within your soul, there is the calm of early morn; in mine, hot, burning noonday. I implore you, leave me to myself."

Irma was filled with a deep longing for boundless solitude, but she dared not show it. She would gladly have closed her eyes, but obsequious glances were required of her. She listened and answered, but her soul was far away. For the first time in her life, she felt indignant that there was a fellow-being who enjoyed rights of which she was deprived. She felt angry at the queen. She was, several times, on the point of mentioning her visit to Gunther's house, but felt that life there had nothing in common with the constant gloom of the queen's apartment. It seemed to her, moreover, that it were wrong, even in thought, to bring hither the citizen-wife whose footsteps had never entered the palace; and then she thought of her father and his strong sense of independence.

And while such were her thoughts, she spoke of the prince and of Walpurga's amusing peculiarities.

The queen saw that Irma's thoughts were slightly tinged with sadness and, wishing to cheer her up, said:

"Ah, dear Countess, I am really languishing for music. Friend Gunther has forbidden my listening to music, lest it might affect my nerves; but one of your little songs would do no harm. I hear that you've learned a beautiful one from the nurse. Won't you sing it for me? May I send for your zither?"

Irma felt more like crying, but she bowed assent and sent a servant for the zither. He brought it, and Irma sang:

Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me.

My heart doth bear a burden, love,
And thou hast placed it there;
And I would wager e'en my life
That none doth heavier bear.

Within Irma's soul there was a shrill, discordant accompaniment to this song, every word of which had a double meaning.

"And I must sing this to the queen," said the voice within her. "Yes, you two are united. All happy ones are. The unhappy one is always lonely."

Her song was full of gloomy despair ; her heart, of anger.

"You sing that with deep feeling," said the queen, "and my son hears it, too. One can scarcely say 'hears,' for all that he hears or sees is undefined. Pray repeat the song, so that I may sing it to myself."

Irma sang it again, but this time her mind was more at ease. The queen thanked her heartily. "The Doctor has unfortunately forbidden my conversing for any length of time, even with those who are dear to me. I am delighted to think that we shall soon go to the summer palace. Then we will spend much of our time together and with the child. Adieu ! dear Countess, write soon, and sing your lovely soul into the child's heart."

Irma went away. While passing through the long corridors, she stopped several times, as if to remember where she was. At last she reached her room, and gave orders that her horse be saddled at once and that a groom be in waiting.

Irma had just changed her dress when a servant brought her a letter. She broke the seal with a trembling hand and read :

"My child.—You have now been at court for eighteen months. I have left you free and uncontrolled. There are many things which I would like to say to you, but cannot write. Writing estranges. Your rooms are ready, and flowers await you. It is now lovely summer and the apples on your tree are getting ruddy cheeks like your own, and I should like to see yours again. Come to
"YOUR FATHER."

Irma threw up her hands. "This is deliverance ! Yes, I still have a home, and there is still a heart against which I can rest my head. I am coming, father ! I am coming !"

Her brain whirled with excitement. She rang for her servant and sent word to the groom that she would not ride out. Then, after having ordered the waitingmaid to pack up enough clothes for several weeks, as quickly as possible, she presented herself before the queen and asked for leave of absence.

"I am sorry that you, too, leave me," said the queen, "but I shall gladly part with you if it only helps, as I hope it will, to make you happy. Do all that lies in your power to be in full accord with your father. Believe me, Irma, in the various relations of life, be it as wife or as mother, one is sensible of a constant desire to grow and expand with each succeeding day ; the child alone is perfectly satisfied with itself."

The queen and Irma were not in accord that day. Irma was restless and anxious to depart. Whatever detained her, though it were only for a second, excited her resentment.

What the queen was saying, might have been interesting to one who was not in a hurry, but not to her whose foot was already on the carriage step.

The parting was, nevertheless, an affecting one, the queen kissing Irma.

All that now remained was to ask Countess Brinkenstein's formal assent. That, too, was obtained.

She had not yet said farewell to Doctor Gunther and his family. She wished to say good-bye through Colonel Bronnen, or Baron Schoning who had told her that he often visited the Doctor's house. It was also necessary to take leave of these men and her companions at court. Now that she was about to go, she found out how many acquaintances she had. But where are they when you need them? They are here, simply that you may not need them. Such is the world; but stop! There's one to whom, of all others, you must say farewell. She hurried off to Walpurga.

"Walpurga," she exclaimed, "when you get up to-morrow, shout as loud as you can. By that time, I'll be at our mountain home, and I'll shout back to you until the whole world rings with laughter. I'm going to my father."

"I'm glad of it."

"And are n't you sorry to see me go?"

"Of course; but if your father's still alive you ought n't miss looking into the eyes that are only once in the world for you. I'm glad, for your father's sake, that he's able to look on such a child as you are. Oh! if my Burgei were only as tall."

"Walpurga, I'll also go to see your husband, your child and your mother. I'll sit down at your table and remember you to your cow and your dog. I shall; depend upon it."

"Oh! how happy they'll be! If Hansei's only at home and not in the woods."

"If he is, I'll have them send for him; and now farewell! do n't forget me!"

"You can rely on that," said Walpurga, while Irma hurried away.

She still found time to write to her friend Emma:

"*Dearest Emma*: Two hours ago, I received a letter from father. He calls me home to him. I have leave of absence for a fortnight. Do you know what that means? I was obliged to promise that I would surely return; I do n't know whether I shall keep my promise. The earth trembles at my feet and my head swims. The world is all chaos, but there will be light! Any one can say: 'Let there be light!' If we only could always do our best. But I shall not write another word. It is enough; I shall see you soon. Come to Wildenort as soon as you can, to your

"IRMA.

"P.S.—I shall take no excuse; you must come. In return, I promise to go to your wedding. Many greetings to all of yours, and, above all, to your Albrecht."

The sun was already sinking towards the horizon, when Irma, accompanied by her maid, departed for Wildenort.

CHAPTER IX.

SO one can go away, after all, and leave the motley monotony called "the world" behind. Farewell, thou palace, and furnish thy inmates with their daily pleasures. Farewell, ye streets, filled with shops and offices, towers and churches, theatres, music-halls and barracks. May fashion be gracious and favor you with customers, clients, guests, applause, and fostering laws. Vanish, frail frippery! I feel like a bird flying from the housetop, out into the wide world. How foolish to remain in the cage when the door is always open. Thou, great bailiff who holdest the world captive—thy name is custom!

Thus thought Irma to herself, while seated in the carriage and driving out into the open world.

Her thoughts again recurred to the great house which she had just left. It was the dinner hour and they were waiting for the queen to appear. What a pity that the lord steward had not been present at the creation of the world, for here every one has his fixed place and the service is simply perfect. The queen expresses her regrets at the departure of Countess Irma. All praise her.

"Oh she 's so very good," says one.

"And so merry," says another.

"Somewhat unmanageable, but very amiable," says still another.

But what is there new? It 's a bore to be talking of one subject all the time. Help! Zamiel Schnabelsdorf!

"Away with it all!" exclaimed Irma, suddenly; "I shall not look back again, but forward to my father."

The horses stepped out bravely, as if they knew they were carrying a child to her father.

Irma was so impatient that she told the servant who was seated on the box, to give a double fee to the driver so that they might get on faster.

She could hardly wait until she saw her father, so anxious was she to rest her head upon his breast.

What did she desire? To complain to him? How could he help her? She knew not. All she knew was that, with him, there must be peace. She wished to be sheltered, protected; no longer alone. To obey him and anticipate his every wish would be her highest happiness. To be released from herself, and to desire nothing that did not minister to the joy of another—oh, how happy the thought! The whole earthly load is removed. Thus must it be with the blessed spirits above! Thus should we imagine angels to be! They want for nothing and need nothing, they never change and never grow, are neither young nor old. They are eternal, and are ever laboring for and through others. Their works bring joy to the world and to themselves. They are the undying rays of an eternal sun.

During the greater part of the journey, Irma's brain was filled with such unintelligible dreams, and the whole world seemed to be saying; "Father—Daughter."

She regained composure at last. It would not do to arrive at the castle in this state.

Agitation is weakness, and it had always been her father's aim to foster strength of mind and self-command.

Irma forced herself to observe what was going on about her.

It was twilight when they reached the first post station. Irma fancied she could almost feel the air of her native mountains, although they were still far off.

They drove on at a rapid pace. The evening bells were ringing, and the air was filled with their sounds, carrying them out to the men and women in the fields, and measuring time and eternity for them.

What would the world be without its bells, whose pealing harmonies are to serve as a substitute for the beautiful creations of antique art?

But these thoughts failed to satisfy Irma. They lifted her out of the world, whilst she desired to occupy herself with what was present and established.

In the villages through which they drove, and the fields by which they passed, there was singing, interrupted, now and then, by the rattling of the carriage wheels, and Irma thought: We make too much noise in this world, and thus miss enjoying what the rest may have to tell us.

No thoughts were to her liking. No outlook pleased her.

The stars appeared in the heavens, but what were they to man? They shine for him who is free and has naught to seek on earth. She, however, was seeking, and, in the world's vast circle, could see nothing but two starry eyes directed upon her; and they were her father's.

They continued on their journey, disturbing lazy horses and sleepy postilions at every station.

It was long after midnight when they arrived at Wildenort.

Irma alighted at the manor-house and, accompanied by the servant, knocked at the door.

Her father had not expected her so soon. There were no lights in the large house, or its extensive outbuildings. Dogs barked, for strangers were coming. There was not even a dumb beast that knew Irma, for she was a stranger in her father's house.

Two ploughboys passed by. They were astonished to see the beautiful lady at that hour, and she was obliged to tell them who she was.

She ordered her rooms to be opened. Her father slept near by. She longed to see him, but controlled herself. He should sleep calmly and not know that she was breathing near him. She, too, soon fell asleep and did not wake till broad daylight.

Stepping softly, old Eberhard entered the ante-chamber where Irma's maid was already sitting.

"My lady the Countess, is still sleeping. It was three o'clock, just about daybreak, when we arrived."

"What made you hurry so and take no rest?"

"I do n't know; but the Countess was quite excited on the way. They could n't drive fast enough for her. When my lady wishes anything, it must be done at once."

"Who are you, dear child?"

"Her ladyship's maid."

"No, but who are your parents? What took you to court?"

"My father was riding-master to Prince Adolar, and her royal highness had me educated in the convent school."

A chain of dependents, from generation to generation, thought the old man to himself.

The maid looked at him wonderingly.

He was tall and broad shouldered. He wore the mountaineer's dress and a white horn whistle hung by a cord from his neck. His fine head bent slightly forward and rested on a massive neck; his gray hair and beard were thick and closely cropped; his brown eye still sparkled, as if in youth; his expressive countenance looked like embossed work, and his whole figure resembled that of a knight who has just laid aside his armor and put himself at ease.

"I wish to see my daughter," said the old man as he went into the adjoining room. It was dark. Eberhard stepped to the window, on tiptoe, and drew aside the green damask curtain. A broad ray of light streamed into the room. He stood before the bed and, with bated breath, watched the sleeping one.

Irma was beautiful to behold. Her head, encircled by the long, loosened, golden brown tresses; the clear, arched brow, the delicately chiseled nose, the mouth with its exquisitely curved upper lip, the rosy chin, the full cheeks with their peach-like glow—over all there lay a calm and peaceful expression. The beautiful, small, white hands lay folded on her breast.

Irma was breathing heavily, and her lips moved as if with a sad smile. It is difficult to sleep with one's hands folded on the breast. The hands gently loosened themselves, but the left one still rested on her heart. The father lifted it carefully and laid it at her side. Irma slept on quietly. Silently, the father took a chair and sat down at her bedside. While he sat there, two doves alighted on the broad window-sill, where they remained cooing with each other. He would have liked to frighten them away, but he dared not stir. Irma slept on and heard nothing.

Suddenly, the pigeons flew away, and Irma opened her eyes.

"Father!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him. "Home again! Oh, how happy it makes me! Do

draw the other curtain, so that I can see you better, and pray open the window so that I may inhale my native air ! Oh, father ! I've been away and now I've come back to you, and you won't let me go away again. You will support me in your powerful arms. Oh, now I think of what you said to me in my dream. We were standing together up on the Chamois hill and you took me up in your arms and, while carrying me, said : 'See, my child ; so long as one of your parents lives, there is some one to help you bear up in the world.' Oh, father ! Where have I been ? Where am I now ?"

"Be calm, my child. You've been at court and now you're home again. You're excited. Calm yourself. I'll call the servant. Breakfast is ready in the arbor."

He kissed her forehead and said :

"I kiss all your good and pure thoughts, and now let us live together again, as plain and sensible beings."

"Oh, that voice ! To be in my father's house and at home once more ! Life elsewhere is just like sleeping in one's clothes. 'T is only at home that one can rest ; for there no bond oppresses us."

He was about to leave, but Irma detained him.

"I feel so happy," said she, "to be here and look at you ; to see you and think of you, all the time."

The father passed his hand over her forehead, and she said :

"Let your hand rest there. I now believe in the laying on of hands ; my own experience convinces me."

He remained at her bedside for some time, his hand still resting upon her forehead.

At last he said :

"And now arise, my child. I shall expect you at breakfast."

"I am glad there is some one who can command me to 'get up'."

"I do n't command, I simply advise you. But, my dear child, something strange must be going on with you, as you understand nothing in its literal sense."

"Yes, father—very strange ! but that's all over, now."

"Well then, follow me as soon as you can ; I shall await you."

The father went out to the arbor, where he awaited her coming. He moved the two cups and the beautiful vase of flowers first to one position, and then to another, and arranged the white tablecloth. Shortly after, Irma entered, clad in a white morning dress.

"You're—you're taller than I thought you were," said the father, a bright color suffusing his face.

He stroked his daughter's cheek, while he said ;

"This white spot on your rosy cheek, extending from the jaw to the cheek bone, is just as your mother had it."

Irma smiled and, grasping both of her father's hands, looked

into his eyes. Her glance was so full of happiness that the old man who, at all times, preserved his equanimity, found his eyes filling with tears. He endeavored to conceal them, but Irma said:

"That won't in the least detract from your heroism. Oh, father, why are we such slaves to ourselves? Why should we be afraid to appear as we are? Your great rule is that we should follow out our natures. Why do we not always do so? Oh, father let me send up a joyful shout to my native mountains, to the forests and the lakes! I'm with ye, again, my constant friends! Let us live together! Hold fast by me and I will be as faithful as ye are! I greet thee, sun; and yonder hill under which my mother rests—"

She could not go on. After some time, the old man said:

"It would be well, my child, if we could live out our life in all its native purity; but it is neither fear of ourselves, nor self-imposed slavery that induces us to avoid such scenes, such violent agitation. It is a deep-seated feeling that, by contrast, the next moment must appear bald and commonplace. It would oblige us to plunge from a life of excessive sensibility into the every day world. It is for this reason that we should, and do, exercise self-control; for such emotions should not exhaust themselves in what might be called a devout outburst, but should extend through all our acts and thoughts, even to the smallest and most insignificant. That is the source of our noblest aspirations. Yes, my child, the very ones who thus, as it were, divide their life in two, profane the one-half of it, while they secretly flatter themselves: We have had great and noble emotions and are still capable of feeling them."

The old housekeeper brought the coffee. Irma waited on her father and told him that she expected Emma and her betrothed. Eberhard said:

"When Emma was here, years ago, your thoughts ran in the same vein as at present. We were on the Chamois hill, where a fine view of the great lake can be obtained, and were waiting to see the sunrise. Emma, in her matter-of-fact and plain-spoken way, said: 'I do n't think it worth while to lose one's sleep and go to so much trouble for this. I find the sunset fully as beautiful and far less troublesome.' What did you answer her at the time?"

"I can't remember, father dear."

"But I do. You said: 'The sunrise is far more elevating, but I do n't know what one can do to have the rest of the day in keeping with lofty mood thus inspired. Sunset is better for us, because the world then veils itself and allows us to rest. After beholding the highest, there are only two things left us—sleep and music.'"

"But, father, I've ceased to think so. Yesterday, during the whole of my drive, I was haunted by the thought: What are we in

the world for, after all? Without us the trees would still grow; the beasts, the birds and the fishes would still live without us. All these have a purpose in the world; man alone is obliged to seek one. Men paint, and build, and till the soil, and study how they may the better kill each other. The only difference, after all, between mankind and the beast is that man buries his dead."

"And have you ventured so far, my child? I am indeed glad that you're with me once again. You must have had much to contend with. I trust you will once more learn to believe that our proper destiny is, to live in accordance with nature and reason. Look at the world!" said he, with a smile. "A maiden twenty-one years of age, and a countess to boot, asks: 'Why am I in the world?' Ah, my child, to be beautiful, to be good, to be as lovely as possible in mind as well as in outward form. Conduct yourself so that you can afford to wish that every one might know you thoroughly.—But enough of this, for the present."

The hour that father and daughter thus spent together in the arbor was full of happiness for both, and Irma repeatedly expressed a wish that she could thus live forever.

Oblivious of all else, each seemed to constitute the other's world.

"You've become my great tall girl," said the father. He had intended to say: "You must have gone through a great deal, for you return to your father and have nothing to tell about matters trifling or personal to yourself." He had intended to say this, but simply repeated: "You've become my great girl."

"And, father! you order me to remain with you, do you not?"

"You know very well that I've never ordered you to do anything, since you were able to think for yourself," replied the father. "I'd have you act according to your own convictions, and not against your will or reason."

Irma was silent. She had not received the answer she had hoped for, and, feeling that she must herself bring about the desired result, determined to do so.

A forest-keeper came to receive instructions in regard to the woods. Eberhard replied that he would ride out there himself. Irma begged to be allowed to accompany him and, her father consenting, she soon appeared in a hunting dress and rode off with him across the meadows and in the direction of the forest.

Her face glowed with animation while she felt herself moving along on the spirited steed, through the shady, dewy forest.

While her father was giving his orders to the forest-keepers, Irma was resting on a mossy bank under a broad, spreading fir tree. Her father's dog had already made friends with her, and now came up and licked her hand. Thus awakened, she arose and walked over towards the field at the edge of the forest. The first object her eyes fell upon was a four-petaled clover-leaf. She

quickly possessed herself of it. Her father now joined her and noticed her happy looks.

"How much good it has done me to rest on the earth," said she.

He made no reply. He did not think it necessary that every feeling, however deep, should find vent in words.

Irma looked up in surprise. In the world of conversation, small change is paid back for every remark.

They soon returned home.

During the afternoon they were seated together in the cool library. Cicero's words, "When I am alone, then am I least alone," were written in letters of gold, over the door.

The father was writing and would occasionally look at his daughter, who was engaged with a volume of Shakespeare. She was reading the noblest thoughts, taking them up into herself and making them a part of her own soul.

Eberhard felt it a joy to detect his own glance in another's eye, to hear his own thoughts from other lips, and that eye and those lips his child's—to note that her soul reflected his, although native temperament and peculiar impressions had served to make hers different from and independent of his own. The ideal that had filled his youthful dreams now stood before him, incarnate.

Eberhard soon closed his book and smiled to himself. He was not so strong as he had imagined. Now that his child was with him, he could not keep on with his work, as he had done the day before. He sat down by Irma, and, pointing to Spinoza's and Shakespeare's works, that always lay on his worktable, he said :

"To them, the whole world was revealed. Although they lived centuries ago, they are my constant companions on these lonely mountains. I shall pass away and leave no trace of my thoughts behind me, but I've already lived the life eternal in the companionship of the noblest minds. The tree and the beast live only for themselves, and during the short period that ends with death. With life, we inherit the result of centuries of thought and he who, within himself, has become a true man fully embodies the idea of humanity. Thus you live on, with your father and with all that is true and beautiful in the history of the human race."

There was a long pause. It was, at last, broken by the father's saying :

"Did n't you come in a court carriage ?"

"Certainly."

"And so you intend to return to court ?"

"Father, do n't let us speak of that, now. I've not, like you, strength enough to drop from the greatest heights down to the level of every day life."

"My child, every day affairs are the highest that can engage us."

"But I'd like to forget that there is such a thing as a court, or

that I've ever been, or ever shall be, anything but part of your heart and soul."

"No, you're to live for yourself; but if you wish to remain with me, all you need do is to send the carriage back."

"I shall have to return, though it be but for a few days. I have only leave of absence, not a discharge. The best thing would be for you to go with me and bring me back again."

"I can't go to court, as you well know; and I give you credit for enough strength to take yourself away from there. I was watching you to-day while you lay asleep. There's nothing false in you; as yet, no evil passions cloud your brow. I know your brother is anxious to have you marry, and I, too, wish that you may become a good wife and mother. But I fear that you have become too much your own, ever to become another's. Be that as it may, my child, look at the scene spread out before you. Myriads of flowers are blooming, silent and unknown. Should a wanderer pass by and feast his eyes upon them, or even pluck a flower, it has lived for him. Should it blossom and fade away unseen, it has lived for itself. But, my child, don't go out of your way to please me. How long is your leave?"

"A fortnight."

"Let us spend the time in truth and cheerfulness, and then act as your judgment dictates."

CHAPTER X.

THE days passed by quietly. Eberhard had little to do with his neighbors, but was always glad to see the burgomaster of the village, who was, also, a deputy to the Diet, and to consult with him regarding the affairs of the community.

Irma spent much of her time alone. She read, embroidered, painted and sang. After the first few days, a reaction set in.

"What is this life?" she asked herself, "of what use? I work for dress—dress for my soul and for my body. And to what purpose? The mirror sees me, the walls hear me, and I have my father for one hour at noon and another in the evening."

She endeavored to control her flights and, although she succeeded in that, could not prevent herself from thinking of one who was distant. She would look around as if she could hear his footsteps and as if the air were filled with his presence; and that man was—the king.

She could not but think that he expected a letter from her, and what had he received? The news of her departure. Why should she insult and mortify him?

While at Wildenort, she was several times on the point of writing to him. She wanted to tell him that she had meant to flee from him; nay, from herself. Framing the sentences in her mind,

she would say to herself: Flight is not cowardice. Indeed, it requires great strength thus to tear one's self away. She meant to make this clear to him. She did not wish him to think ill of humanity and, least of all, of her. His great and extended energy should not to be weakened, or even disturbed, by the consciousness that mankind had no conception of the truly noble. She owed it, both to him and to herself, to explain this; but it is difficult to do it all in writing. She would, therefore, return and tell him all, and, after that, they would, although distant, be united in the noblest thoughts. She felt satisfied that she would find full compensation for a lonely life in the recollection of one moment of perfect communion with a noble mind, and the consciousness of truth and purity in thought and deed.

Irma was delighted to think that she had thus liberated herself.

She refrained, as far as possible, from speaking to her father about the court; but a remark would, now and then, involuntarily escape her, and she would tell how the king and the queen had praised this or that, or had uttered such and such a remark, and it was easily to be seen that she attached special importance to what they had said.

"That 's the way with men," said Eberhard, smiling. "They know what they are, or, at least, ought to; and yet they give a prince the right to stamp them with a value. It is he who determines: you are worth so and so much; you a ducat, you a thaler, you a mere brass counter, you a privy councilor and you a colonel. The story of the creation of the world is thus ever renewed. There it says that the Creator led the beasts out before man so that he might give them names. Here the human animals come to the prince and say: 'Give us a name, or we shall feel as if naked and be afraid.'"

Irma started at these harsh words. Solitude had brought her father to this point. She could not refrain from saying:

"You do the king great injustice; he has a noble mind and is full of intelligence."

"Intelligence! I know all about that," replied Eberhard. "He can ask questions without number, propound problems and, for his dessert, would fain have an epitome of ecclesiastical history, physiology or any other interesting department of knowledge. But he never applies himself; never reads a work through. He requires excerpts and essences. I know all about it. And the courtly roulade singers place their thoughts at his service. Do n't imagine, my child, that I underrate the king's efforts. They've always told him: 'You are a genius!' They are always persuading kings that they possess genius, either military, political or artistic. All who approach a monarch are obliged, even in an intellectual sense, to attire themselves in court dress. He never sees men and things in their true colors; they all drape themselves to

please him. Nevertheless, I believe the king honestly endeavors to see things as they are, and that's a great deal; but he can't shake off the magic spell of set forms and phrases."

Irma's lips trembled with emotion. She did not believe that her father meant to weaken her interest in the king, since he could not know of its existence; but his antagonism irritated her and she saw, with alarm, that no help was to be looked for in that quarter. She might have shared her father's solitude, if he had honored the exalted man as she did. He might have done homage to the noble mind, even though it was a monarch's, without doing violence to his republican feelings, or his sense of justice. But now he destroyed every bridge that had led to a better understanding and to justice. If another had spoken thus of the king, she would have made him feel her wrath, and now she felt that her silence was a sufficient sacrifice to filial duty. Her heart seemed to close up within itself, as if never again to be opened. She was a stranger in her father's house and now doubly felt that she had never been at home there. She forced herself to appear cheerful and tranquil.

Eberhard observed that an inner conflict agitated her, and thought it was merely a struggle between court life and solitude. He did not aid her, for he thought that she could best gain peace if she fought the battle for herself.

On Sunday morning—Eberhard never went to church—he said:

"Have you time to listen to a long story?"

"Certainly."

"Then let me make my will while I am yet in health."

"Pray, father, do n't do that. Spare me!"

"I do n't mean as to my possessions, but as to myself. We have no picture of your dear mother, and none of you children have any idea of her appearance—so pure, so lovely, so full of sunshine; and, for that reason, I mean to give you a picture of my life. Treasure it. Who knows when I may again have a chance? If there's anything that you do n't understand or that seems to you in danger of being misinterpreted, ask me about it. I do n't find such objections an interruption. I pursue my life in its even tenor; nothing disturbs me. I've accustomed myself to improve my estate, to give orders to my servants and to answer their questions, and, afterwards, to take up the train of thought just where it was broken off; and so you, too, may interrupt me whenever you care to.

"My father, who was a free count, was always proud of his direct relations to the empire. Unto his last day, he would never acknowledge the unity of the kingdom and would always ask: 'How goes it over there?' He regarded his domain as distinct from the rest, and his family as on an equality with all princely houses."

"And why, dear father," asked Irma, "would you destroy these

beautiful memories that have been handed down from generation to generation?"

"Because history itself has destroyed them, and justly, too. It is necessary for the preservation of mankind that new races should constantly ascend to the surface; but I did n't mean to tell you about my father. I spent a happy youth in this house. My preceptor, although an ecclesiastic, was a man of liberal opinions. I entered the military service a year before my father's death and, though I say it myself, presented no mean figure while there, for I possessed good looks and an iron frame. I was stationed with my regiment, in a fortress belonging to the confederation. While recklessly riding one day, I fell from my horse and dislocated my hip. It laid me up for a long time and thus afforded me an opportunity to become better acquainted with our regimental surgeon, Doctor Gunther. Has he never told you of the the times we passed together?"

"He has merely mentioned them. It was only a few days ago that the king told me I was right in saying that Doctor Gunther would only furnish verbal prescriptions when they were demanded and were really necessary."

"Ah! and so the king said that you were right? 'You are right'—that is a real mark of grace and should make one happy for a whole day and perhaps even longer. Is n't it so?"

"Father—did n't you mean to tell me more about your life with Gunther?"

"Ah, my child, that was a wondrous time. As far as I was able, I dived, with him, into the study of philosophy. I can still remember, as if it were this very moment, the very hour and the very place by the fortress wall—it was a dull evening in Autumn; I can still see the leaves as they fell from the trees—when Gunther, for the first time, explained to me the great saying of the all-wise one: 'Self-preservation is the first law of nature.' I stood as if rooted to the spot; it dawned upon me like a revelation, and has never since left me. Although at times obscured by the events of life, 'preserve thyself,' has always been before my mind. I have faithfully lived up to the great precept, and alas, as I now see, too completely and selfishly. The man who lives only for himself does not live a complete life, but I can confess this to you, of all others, without fear. It was only later that I came thoroughly to know the great right of sovereignty that belongs to every human being. I had done much thinking before that, but never in logical connection. You cannot imagine what courage it requires, on the part of a favorite and respected officer, to venture on the study of philosophy; how opposed it is to the very idea of military service, how improper it seems to one's superiors, and how ridiculous to one's comrades. Military service so exhausts the body, by daily, and for the greater part, useless exercises, that it renders it difficult to cul-

tivate one's mind. I often excused myself, as unwell, and remained in my room during the loveliest weather, simply on account of my studies. Our regiment was ordered to the capital, and Gunther accepted my offer of a discharge. He became a professor and I attended lectures. But I was painfully conscious of my deficiency in knowledge and ardently longed for a chance to devote my life to perfecting my education. An unforeseen event helped to bring about the desired end. I had become gentleman of the bedchamber and spent much of my time at court. At that early day, I observed the ineradicable, servile spirit that dwells in man. Every one rejoices that there are others lower down in the scale than himself, and is willing, on that account, to suffer some to stand above him. Princes are not to blame for this ladder of nonsense. One day while at the summer palace, the king had gone out hunting, and although it was long past the dinner-hour, not a glimpse of him was to be seen. The chamberlains and the court ladies—I forget their titles—were walking in the park. They would sit down on the benches, look through their spy-glasses, and endeavor, unsuccessfully however, to keep up a sustained conversation; for the ladies and gentlemen, both young and old, were possessed of vulgar hunger. And still the herdsman who was to put fodder in the rack for them, did not make his appearance. Your uncle Willibald, pacified his gnawing hunger with little biscuits, which did not destroy his appetite. Hours passed, while they walked about like Jews on the Day of Atonement. But they laughed and joked—at least they tried to—while their stomachs growled. And though your uncle had thirty horses in his stables at home, with oxen and cows and many broad acres besides, he was content to serve and wait there, because he took great pride in being lord chamberlain. At that time, my child, I was as old as you are now, and I swore to myself never more to be a servant to any man. At last, the king's hunting carriage arrived. All were profuse in their greetings and received him with smiling faces. And yet his majesty was in a bad humor, for while he had been unsuccessful, General Kont, who had been one of the hunting party, had committed the impropriety of shooting a deer with twelve antlers. The General felt very unhappy at his good luck, and his head hung as mournfully as that of the dead beast. He apologized again and expressed his regrets that his majesty had not killed the stag. With rueful countenance, the monarch congratulated him. The king looked at me and asked: 'How are you?'

"Very hungry, Your Majesty," was my answer. The king smiled, but the rest of the court were horror-struck at my impertinence.

"We were obliged to wait another half hour, while the king changed his dress and, at last, we went to dinner.

"My child, if you were to tell the story to a courtier, he would

consider me intolerably stupid ; but that meal was the last I ever ate at princely table.

"I know that I 'm talkative—I 'm an old man. I merely wanted to say : Look about you and see how many human sacrifices they are constantly requiring.

"The idea of princely dignity is a noble and beautiful one. The prince should embody the unity of the state ; but, although the idea, in itself, is beautiful, the knowledge that its realization requires a pyramid of worn out creatures, divested of human dignity, renders it repulsive to me.

"Irma, I feel as if I must impress the testament of my soul upon yours. The moment you feel that you 've lost the smallest portion of your crown of human dignity, flee, without hatred or contempt ; for he who carries such feelings in his soul is heavily laden and can never breathe freely. I do n't hate the world ; neither do I despise it. It simply appears to me strange, decayed, distant. Nor can I hate or despise any one, because his belief is different from mine.

"But as I do n't wish to teach you, I will go on with my story. I applied for my discharge and entered the university as a student. I soon left, however, in order to continue my education in an agricultural school. After that, I traveled and, as you know, spent an entire year in America. I had a great desire to become acquainted with that new phase of history in which men are born to intellectual freedom and are not constantly looking back towards Palestine, Greece or Rome. I do n't find the world of the future in America. All there is still, as it were, in a state of ferment suggestive of primeval processes ; but whether a new civilization will be the result, is more than I know. I do know, however, that all mankind is patiently waiting for a new moral compact. But I, and many more of us, will never live to see it realized.

"Will the world of the future be governed by pure ideas, or will it again look up to some lofty personage as its exemplar ? I should wish for the former, but its realization seems far off.

"Now to continue with the story of my life.

"I returned home and, meeting your mother, was unutterably happy. She was alone in the world. I have enjoyed the greatest of all happiness ; there is none other like it. Three years after you were born, your mother died. I cannot give you particulars about her. Her whole appearance was one of strength and purity. The world regarded her as cold and reserved, but she was ardent and open-hearted, beautiful to her very heart, but only for me. I know that if she had been spared to me, I would have become one of the best and kindest of men. I dare not think of that.

"It was not to be.

"But I feel as if sanctified through her, for since that time no base thought has ever entered my soul ; nor have I ever committed a deed that I should feel ashamed to confess to my daughter.

"She died, and I stood alone, my violent nature confronting the enigma of life.

"Although I could not give my children a stepmother, I became a stepfather to them. Yes, let me speak on: I am a stepfather towards myself. I know that if others heard me, they would say that I am using too strong language. It is the fashion to be indulgent nowadays, but I am not in the mode. I put my children away from me. I placed you with your aunt, until you entered the convent, and Bruno remained with me until he went to the seminary. You were in fine institutions, with expensive fees, but you were nevertheless put away from me. You did not know your father; you merely knew that he was alive, but did not live with him. You grew up like orphaned children.

"It is only two years since I confessed this to myself. For weeks, it robbed me of sleep, of feeling and of thought, and still I adhered to it. The demon called sophistry was ever telling me 'You could have been of no use to your children. You had still too much to do for yourself, and it is better for them that they should become free human agents through their own unaided efforts than through you.' There may be some truth in it, but nevertheless, I've put my children away from me."

The old man paused. Irma laid her hand upon his and gently stroked it.

"T is well. I've said it at last.

"I remained here, leading a solitary but not a lonely life. I communed with the greatest minds and, at the same time, easily managed our estate.

"I devoted myself to national affairs, but soon withdrew. I can't belong to a party, not even to the one that calls itself the party of freedom. It includes many noble-hearted men whom I honor and respect, but they put up with too many frivolous comrades who, while they prate of equality and of the highest good of man, do not hesitate to sacrifice their fellow-beings to themselves. Aristocratic triflers are simply vicious, but democratic triflers are corrupters of ideas. He who dare not wish that the whole people should think and act as he does, has no right to term himself a free and honest man.

"If liberty does not rest on morality, what is there to distinguish it from tyranny? What is tyranny? The egotistical abuse of beings endowed with equal rights to ourselves. A tyrant, in effect, denies his God. A frivolous democrat blasphemes Him. By the term God, I mean the full conception of the world's moral law. I was a hermit in the midst of the crowd, and am happier and more consistent, when away from the world.

"And now I am here leading a solitary life."

"Is n't it sad to be so lonely?" asked Irma.

"If I felt lonely, it would be very hard," replied Eberhard; "but

man should not feel lonely, though he be alone. *Ennui* and loneliness have no resting place here. Men who are nothing to themselves are lonely wherever they be; but let me continue my story.

"Gunther's defection caused me the greatest sorrow, but I was unjust towards him. He always was a friend of court life and regarded it as the culmination of culture. He was always too aesthetic and would often say: 'I, too, have a claim on the luxuries, the comforts, the pleasures of life and am determined to have my share of them.' That led him to court and caused him to desert free science and, at the same time, to lose both himself and me.

"You have probably been told, and have perhaps even yourself thought, that I am a misanthrope. He who hates mankind is a vain fool. In what respect is he better than the rest, or different from them? I don't hate mankind. I only know that most of them, either by their own efforts or through those of others, appear in false colors. They affect an interest in things that do not concern them and, in most instances, do not even know that it is affectation. I have often been deceived and cheated, but, I frankly confess, it was because I deceived myself. I gave forth what was best in me, and imagined that others were with me, but it was mere politeness that induced them to assent. They were not hypocrites; it was I who deceived myself. I imagined myself in a world in which all was peace and harmony, while, in fact, I was alone, completely alone. Every one who has a character of his own, is alone. There is no such thing as perfect accord; to live out one's self is all that remains. But most men do not care to do this, and they are best off. They live as custom and morals require, and do not greatly concern themselves about the present or the past. They jump or dawdle, as the case may be, from mood to mood, from enjoyment to enjoyment, and, as long as they can always see the same face when they look in the glass, are perfectly content. Such faces never change. If the human countenance always expressed the thoughts that fill the soul, you would not be able to recognize any one from day to day, or even from hour to hour. I do not know, my child, where I am leading you to; I only meant to tell you that I am not a misanthrope. I love all men. I know that, at bottom, they cannot be different from what they are, and that honest nature still lies concealed beneath their frizzled, over-loaded, glittering masks. They cannot reveal it, however, and in spite of their false, cunning ways, there still remains a great and wise precept: 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And now let me add that I forgive your brother, too. He has deeply mortified me, for the deepest mortification that one can suffer is at the hands of one's child.

"I cannot force Bruno to act against his will, nor do I wish to. It is a strange world. The struggle between father and son drags on through all ages. My son defends the old, and I the new; but I must bear with it all.

"Freedom alone accords with the dictates of nature and reason. But you cannot force one to be free; nor do I wish to force you, in any way. Most women would rather yield to nature than affection, but I do not regard you as an ordinary woman, nor do I wish you to be one. You should—"

Although Eberhard had said that he did not wish to be interrupted, something now came which did interrupt him.

It was a messenger with a letter for Irma. She recognized the handwriting of her friend Emma, and hurriedly opening the letter, read as follows;

"*Irma*.—I cannot come to thee. I have said farewell to the world. Three weeks ago to-day, my Albrecht lost his life through the bite of a mad dog. My life for this world is also at an end. I humbly submit to the inscrutable will of the Almighty. I have vowed to take the veil. I am here now, and shall never again leave this spot. Come, as soon as thou can'st, to thy

"SISTER EUPHROSYNE,

"*In the convent of Frauenwörth.*"

Irma handed the letter to her father to read.

"And so the bite of a mad dog has destroyed two human lives. Who will explain this?" exclaimed Irma.

"In that respect, religion is just as impotent as we are. Like reason, she commands us to obey nature's law."

The messenger waited, and Irma went off to write an answer in which she promised to come.

Meanwhile, Eberhard sat alone. He had confided the story of his life to his child—and what would it avail? How often had he realized that no teaching, be it ever so noble, can change the human mind. Life, observation and experience can alone produce conviction. The weak point of dogmatism is that it attempts to teach that which can only be learnt from life itself. His children had not shared in his life, and it was now of little avail to recount it to them, in all its details, or to explain the motives that directed it. There was enough of contradiction implied in the fact that the father was obliged to tell what his life had been.

In his own mind, Eberhard acknowledged that his own conduct had borne its legitimate results. He had no real claim to filial affection; at all events, not to the degree in which he craved it, for he had lived for himself alone.

When Irma returned and asked permission to visit her friend Emma, he nodded assent. He had boasted that nothing could interrupt him. He might use the rule for himself, but not for others. He had told his child the story of his life—who knew but what this untoward interruption would efface it all from her memory?

CHAPTER XI.

SEATED in the open court carriage, Irma rode o'er hill and dale. She lay back on the cushions; the waitingmaid and the lackey sat on the back seat.

Emma's sad and sudden message had almost paralyzed her; but, now that she was in the carriage, her strength returned. Travel and change of air always exerted a magic influence over her.

The echo of her father's story followed her during a great part of the journey. She had listened with great interest, although the story itself had made but a faint impression upon her. An inner voice told her: These matters are not so serious or important as he takes them. It is his peculiar temperament that causes them to affect his course in life. It would not be so with another. It was enough that she was able to do justice to his eccentricity. He could hardly expect it to exert any decided influence upon her. Emma's fate was horrible, maddening; but her father's was not. Much of his life-trouble was mere self-torment. He spoke of repose, and yet knew it not.

With all Irma's affection for her father, she had really so little in common with him, that the painful expression that played about his mouth, while he told her his history, simply served to remind her of the Laocoön.

Irma shook her head quite petulantly.

What a chaos is the world!

A mad dog destroys a life and, here and there, solitary beings are tormenting themselves to death. Every one is conscious of some fault or weakness; all seek the unattainable and, in unending attempts and trials, life is spent. In the midst of this chaos, a single figure appears. It is full, beautiful, great, sure of life and, in truth, controls life. Irma turned back as if to say: "Alas! it is not you, father, although you could and ought to be the one. The king alone is the one free being on the pinnacle of life."

A smile played about her lips while she thought of him. She looked up at the blue heavens and, forgetting whither she was going, felt as if gentle arms were carrying her away over hill and dale.

An eagle was winging its flight far above the mountain tops. Irma's eyes followed it for a long while. She ordered the driver to stop the carriage, and the servant alighted in order to receive her ladyship's orders. She motioned him to mount the box again and, though all the comforts wealth affords were hers, stopped in the midst of wild nature to watch the eagle hovering in the air, until it at last disappeared in the clouds.

"If one must die, I'd like to die thus," said an inner voice, "fly into heaven and be no more."

They drove on. For the rest of the journey, Irma did not utter a word.

It was towards evening when the lackey said: "We've reached the place."

The road descended towards the lake, by the shore of which the carriage stopped. The convent was on an island in the centre of the lake, and the sounds of the curfew bells filled the air. The sun was still visible over the mountain tops, its rays were almost horizontal, and the dancing, sparkling waves looked like so many lights swimming to and fro. The surface of the lake was rapidly assuming a golden hue.

At the sound of the evening bells, the lackey and the postilion lifted their hats and the waitingmaid folded her hands. Irma also folded her hands, but did not pray. She thought to herself: The sound of the bells is pleasant enough, if one can listen to them from without, and then return to the happy world; but to those who are within the convent, it is a daily death-knell; for life such as theirs, is death.

Irma's mood was not in sympathy with that of her friend, and she did her best to feel as befitted the occasion.

While they were getting the boat ready, she overheard the lackey speaking with another servant whose face she remembered to have seen at court.

She heard the court lackey saying:

"My master's been here for some days and has been waiting for something; I do n't know what."

Irma would have liked to ask with whom he had come, but a sudden fear overpowered her and she was unable to speak a word.

Accompanied by the waitingmaid, she stepped into the boat. An old boatman and his daughter rowed the rudderless skiff. The waters of the lake were deep and dark. The sun was setting, and the shadows of the western mountains were reflected in dark outlines on the hills along the shore. The fresh-fallen snow lay on the glaciers, whose white crests contrasted sharply with the wooded hills of the foreground and the clear blue sky. Below, all was as silent and dusky as though they were sailing into the realm of shadows.

"Is this your daughter?" asked Irma, addressing the old boatman.

He nodded a glad assent, delighted to find her conversant with the dialect of that portion of the country. Her intercourse with Walpurga had kept her in practice.

"Yes," replied the boatman, "and she'd like to go into service with some good family. She can sew well and—"

"Remain with your father; that's the best thing you can do," said Irma to the girl.

They rowed on in silence.

"How deep is the lake here?" enquired Irma.

"Sixty fathoms, at least."

Irma's hand played with the water, and she was pleased with the thought that human beings could so easily and boldly move along over a threatening, watery grave. She leaned a little way over the side of the boat, and the boatman called out:

"Take care, miss!"

"I can swim," replied Irma, splashing the waves.

"That's all very well," said the old man, laughing. "They can all swim until they have to, and then all's over; and if they happen to have clothes hanging to them, mighty few can swim."

"You're right there. Our gay frippery would drag us down."

The old man did not understand her and made no reply.

She was quite excited and asked: "Have many persons been drowned in this lake?"

"Very few; but just below us, there's the body of a young man, twenty-one years old."

"How was he lost?"

"They say he'd been drinking too freely, but I think that he had a sweetheart in the convent over there. It's a good thing she do n't know of it."

Irma looked down into the waves, while the old man continued:

"And over there by the rock the trunk of a tree struck a wood-cutter and hurled him into the lake. Over there by the flood-gate, a milkmaid, fifteen years old, happened to get into the current while the drift logs were whirling along, and by the time her body reached the lake, every bit of clothing had been torn from it by the logs."

"Do n't tell such frightful stories," said the waitingmaid to the man.

Irma looked up at the steep mountains and asked:

"Could one climb up there?"

"Yes, but they'd find it mighty hard work; still, wherever there are trees, man can climb."

Irma looked down into the lake, and then up at the mountains. One can lose one's self in the world. "How would it be if one were to do so?" said the voice within her.

She stood up in the boat. The old man exclaimed:

"Sit down! there's danger if you stir one way or the other."

"I shall not move," said Irma, and she really stood erect in the unsteady little boat.

"By your leave, the beautiful young lady surely does n't mean to enter the convent?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I'd be sorry."

"Why would you be sorry? Do n't the nuns lead a pleasant and peaceful life?"

"Oh yes, they do ; but it is a life in which nothing happens."

As if obeying a higher summons, Irma sat down and immediately stood up again. The boat reeled.

"A life in which nothing happens"—the words touched a chord in her own heart. With her, the pride and strength of youth rebelled against sacrificing one's life in such a manner. It is a life in which nothing happens: whether it be, like her father's, spent in solitary thought, or, like that of the nun's, in common devotion. Are we not placed upon earth so that we may call all our own—come joy, come grief; come mirth, come sadness—a life in which nothing happens is not for me.

Filled with such thoughts she stepped ashore and, while walking up the avenue of lindens that led to the convent, heard the boatman fastening his skiff by the chain.

She inquired for Sister Euphrosyne. The nuns were all at vespers. Irma also repaired to the chapel, in which the everlasting lamp was the only light. Although the service was over, the sisters were still kneeling on the floor. At last they arose, looking like so many ghostly figures stepping out from chaotic darkness.

Irma returned to the parlor, where the portress told her that she would not be allowed to speak to Emma that day, as the sisters were not permitted to receive any communication, or converse with any one, after vespers. Irma, in the meanwhile, was lodged in the convent.

It was a mild September night. Wrapped in her plaid, Irma sat out on the landing until a late hour. Her thoughts were lost in the illimitable. She scarcely knew what she was thinking of, and yet, as if wafted towards her on the air, she would now and then seem to hear the words: "A life in which nothing happens."

On the following morning, after early mass, Irma was permitted to visit her friend. She was frightened when she saw Emma, and yet it was the same mild countenance, only terribly disfigured by the closely fitting hood that completely covered the hair and gave the face greater prominence.

After the first outburst of grief and sympathy that followed the recital of her sad affliction, Emma at last said to Irma, who had again and again pressed her to her heart:

"Your embraces are so passionate. I know you will never be able to learn humility. You cannot; it is not in your nature. But you should acquire equanimity. You could never enter a convent, Irma, and never ought to; for you would long to return to the world. You must become a good wife, but do not imagine that your ideal will ever be realized. Our existence here is fragmentary and full of misery. Life here below is not intended to be beautiful and complete. But, Irma, take heed you do not attempt to loosen a barrier, or to overstep it. Draw back while you are still on this side!"

Emma did not mention the king's name. There was a long pause. Irma felt as if their present surroundings must stifle her.

Emma spoke of what had happened but a few weeks ago, as if decades had passed in the meanwhile. She discoursed to her friend of the strength that lay in continuous devotion; how it lengthened the hours into years full of placid victory over the world. She felt happy that it was possible, even on earth, to lay aside one's name and memories, and to lead an existence which, without one steep step, gradually led one to eternal bliss. Emma, however, complained that they would not allow her to take the veil, and resented it as tyranny that she was only permitted to remain as a serving sister without vows.

"It is right that you should not," exclaimed Irma; "I think Bronnen loves you, but he's a man who respects existing facts. His moral character would lead him to repress, rather than manifest, warm feeling towards an affianced bride. He deserves you. I do n't say that you should now—How could you? How would he dare? You should remain your own mistress and, after you've spent a year or more in the convent, you may, with that excellent man, lead a life which, if void of transports, will be none the less true and beautiful. All I can say to you now is: Do n't fetter your future. No one should take a vow that binds him for life, that, on the very morrow, might seal his lips and make him a slave, a liar, a hypocrite or a deceiver, in his own eyes."

"Irma," exclaimed Emma, "what bad advice you are giving me. Is that the language used at court? Oh forgive me for speaking to you so! It was the old Emma that did it; not I. Forgive me, I pray you, forgive me!"

She threw herself on her knees at Irma's feet.

"Stand up," said Irma, "I've nothing to forgive. I will speak more calmly. You see, dear Emma, it is fortunate for you that you cannot take the vow. A fearful blow has prostrated you; but if you remain free in your seclusion, your load will gradually lighten and your wounds will heal. Then, should the world call you, you are free to return to it. This should be a place of refuge for you, and not a prison."

"Ah yes," said Emma, with a smile, "you must of course think so, but I—I do not care to see the world which no longer contains him who was dearer to me than life. You cannot realize what it is to be betrothed on earth, and be obliged to wait for eternal union in heaven. I have prayed God to take my heart from me and banish every selfish desire, and He has hearkened unto me. It is tyrannical to attempt to force our opinions upon others. Do you still remember, Irma, the first time we read the story of Odysseus, and how he had them bind him to the mast so that he might listen to the songs of the syrens and yet not be able to follow them? Do you still remember the remark you then made?"

"I've quite forgotten it."

"'Much-be-praised Odysseus,' said you, 'was a weakling, not a hero. A hero must not suffer himself to be bound by external fetters; he must resist everything by his inner strength.' Even then, I felt how strong you were. Odysseus was only a heathen, and knew nothing of the eternal law. I rejoice in that law; I cling to that rock. I long for the divine, the eternal bond; it will support me if I sink. I do not wish to return to the world. I wish to fetter myself, and can it be that men who claim to be free dare forbid others to tread the path that leads to perfection—to the true eternal life? Is not that tyrannical and godless?"

"Yes; but who forbids you?"

"The law of the state. It has ordered this convent to be closed and forbids its taking any more young nuns."

"And does the law say that?"

"Yes."

"The king shall not allow it."

Irma spoke so loudly that her words were echoed back from the vaulted ceiling of the cell.

Emma's glance was fastened on Irma—if it only could be brought about!

The two maidens had no time to exchange a word on the subject, for, at that moment, the abbess sent for them.

The abbess addressed Irma, just as if she had overheard the last words of the latter. With gentle voice, but positive manner, she complained of the tyranny of the free-thinkers—whom she did not judge, but simply pitied—and maintained that the attempt to destroy ancient and holy institutions was revolting.

Irma's countenance glowed with excitement. She again said that the law must be repealed, and that she would exert all her influence to bring about that end. She offered to write to the king at once. The abbess gladly accepted the proffered service and Irma wrote:

"*Your Majesty*: I write to you from the convent, but I am not a nun. I believe my talent does not lie in that way. But what laws are these that forbid a maiden from taking the eternal vow? Is that freedom? Is it justice? What is it? Your Majesty will, I trust, pardon my agitation. I am writing with convent ink on convent paper, and it is not the first time that such ink and such paper have been used in the service of freedom.

"Is it possible that one set of human beings can forbid others to live together in seclusion?"

"Quacks cannot create life or happiness; should they, therefore, be allowed to forbid unhappiness from effecting its own cure?"

"Your Majesty's great mind cannot suffer such barbarism, and it is barbarous, although hedged about by culture.

"I am aware, Your Majesty, that I have not yet made my meaning clear. I shall endeavor to do so.

"I am here in the convent.

"Emma, the woman whom I love above all others—I believe I have already spoken of her to Your Majesty—wishes to take the veil. From her point of view, she is in the right. Dogs will go mad, although the dog-tax be paid. A mad dog killed her affianced and she now desires to renounce the world. Who dare prevent it? And yet the law of the state commands that this convent shall die out, and forbids its receiving nuns.

"Your Majesty dare not permit this. Your eye takes in all at a glance; your life is the nation's history. You must teach these journeymen to be greater-minded than they now are. They must abolish this law; indeed, they must.

"Pardon my language, Your Majesty; but I cannot help myself. I feel as if I were your deputy. I feel that your great mind resents such pettiness as an insult.

"I hope to see Your Majesty soon again and, meanwhile, send my most respectful greetings.

"IRMA VON WILDENORT."

Without being observed, Irma enclosed the four-petaled clover-leaf with the letter.

While Irma sat in the boat that took her back to the shore, she was filled with pride. She felt that she had instigated, if not accomplished, a beautiful and noble act in the service of freedom and was determined that it should be carried out.

The old boatman was glad to see her again. He rowed lustily, but did not speak a word. Now and then, he would smile to himself, as if happy in the thought that he was carrying a young soul away from the realm of shadows.

In the distance there was a skiff and, in it, a man clad in a green hunting dress. He waved his hat and bowed.

Absorbed in thought, Irma was gazing into the lake, when her maid drew her attention to the other boat.

Irma started.

"Is it not the king?"

Thinking that he had not yet been observed, the hunter fired off his gun, the report of which was echoed again and again from the hills. He then waved his hat once more. With trembling hand, Irma waved her white handkerchief as a token of recognition.

The skiff approached. Irma's expression rapidly changed from one of joy to that of disappointment.

It was not the king. It was Baron Schoning who greeted her.

He sprang into the boat, kissed her trembling hand and told her how happy he was to meet her there.

They alighted. The Baron offered his arm to Irma and they walked along the bank, the maid going before. In the distance,

Irma could see the lackey who, on the previous day, had been speaking to hers. Had not the servant said that his master had been waiting here for a long time? Had not Baron Schoning, before this, been open in his attentions to her? His words soon relieved her of all doubt on that score.

"We are alone here, in the presence only of the mountains, the lake and the heavens. Dearest Countess! May I speak of something that lies near my heart and which I have for a long while desired to tell you?"

She silently nodded assent.

"Well then, permit me to tell you that the court is not the right place for you."

"I am not quite sure that I shall return there; but why do you think me out of place there?"

"Because there is something in you which will always prevent you from feeling at home there. You are surprised to hear me, the jester, the court-warbler, speak thus. I know very well I bear that title; but believe me, Countess, while they imagine they are playing with me, I am amusing myself at their expense. You, Countess, will never feel at home at court. You do not accept that life and its customs, as fixed and settled. You interpret it according to your own peculiar views; your mind cannot wear a uniform; your soul utters its deepest feelings in its own dialect, and when your utterances get abroad in the liveried world, they find it exceedingly original, but strange and—no one knows it better than I—you have not, and never will have aught in common with those who surround you."

"I should not have believed that you could thus look into my heart; but I thank you."

"I am not looking into your heart; I live in it. O Countess! Oh! thou child-like and all-loving heart, tremble not! Suffer me to clasp this hand in mine, while I tell you that I, too, am a stranger there, and have resolved to retire from court and live for myself on yonder patrimonial estate of mine. Irma, will you render my life a thousand fold happier than it can otherwise be? Will you be my wife?"

It was long before Irma could answer him. At last she said:

"My friend—yes, my friend—on yonder island there lives a friend of mine who is dead, both to herself and me. Fate deals kindly with me and sends me another in her stead. I thank you—but—I am so confused—perhaps more than— But look, dear Baron, at the little cottage half way up the mountain. I would be content to live there—to grow my cabbages, milk my goats, plant my hemp, make my clothes—and could be happy, desiring nothing, forgetting the world and forgotten by it."

"You jest, dear Countess; you are creating an ideal whose bright colors will soon grow dim."

"I do not jest. I could live alone while laboring for my daily bread, but not as the mistress of a castle, and surrounded by the trifles and the frippery of the fashionable world. To dress for the mere sake of seeing one's self in the glass, is not to my taste. In yonder cottage, I could live without a mirror. I need not look at myself, nor need another look at me; but if I am to live with the world, I must be wholly with it; at the reigning centre, in the metropolis, or traveling. I must have all or nothing. Nothing else will make me happy. Nothing half-and-half or intermediate will satisfy me."

Irma's tone was so determined that the Baron saw how thoroughly in earnest she was, and that her words meant more than mere caprice or sport.

"I must either subject myself to the world," said she, "or, despising it, put it beneath me. I must either be perfectly indifferent and regardless of the impression I produce upon others, or else afraid of every glance, even my own."

The Baron was silent, and evidently at a loss for words. At last he said:

"I would gladly have gone to your father's house, but I know that he dislikes men of my class. I waited for you here, knowing that you would come to your friend. Pray answer me another question: Do you intend to return to court?"

"Yes," said Irma, now, for the first time, firmly resolved upon returning. "It were ungrateful to act otherwise. Ungrateful to the queen and to—the king and all my friends. I feel sure, my friend, that I am not yet mature enough to lead a life in which nothing happens."

They came to a seat.

"Will you not sit down with me?" said Irma to the Baron.

They seated themselves.

"When did you leave the capital?"

"Five days ago."

"And was everything going on as usual?"

"Alas, not everything. Doctor Gunther has met with a sad affliction. Professor Korn, his son-in-law, died suddenly, having poisoned himself while dissecting a corpse."

"While dissecting a corpse?" exclaimed Irma. "We all die of the poison of decay, but not so suddenly; those on yonder island and we—all of us."

"You are very bitter."

"Not at all. My head is filled with the strangest fancies. I became acquainted with a great law over there."

"The law of renunciation?"

"Oh no; the justification of fashion."

"You are mocking."

"By no means. Fashion is the charter of human liberty and the journal of fashion is humanity's greatest boon."

"What an odd conceit!"

"Not at all. It is the simple truth. The frequency with which a man changes the material, cut and color of his clothes, proves his claim to culture. It is man alone who constantly clothes himself differently and anew. The tree retains its bark, the animal its hide, and, as the national and clerical costumes are both stereotyped, as it were, those who use them are regarded as belonging to an inferior, or less civilized class."

The Baron looked at Irma, wonderingly. He was glad, at heart, that she had candidly given him the mitten. He could not have satisfied so restless and exacting a nature that constantly required intellectual fireworks for its amusement; and she, moreover, took delight in her absurd ways. All at once, he saw nothing but the shadows in Irma's character. An hour ago, he had seen only the bright side and had regarded her as a vision of light itself. She had just visited a friend about to take the veil, had just listened to a proposal of marriage—how could she possibly indulge in such strange notions immediately afterward?

Baron Schoning told her that he had ordered photographs of Walpurga and the prince.

"Ah, Walpurga," said Irma, as if suddenly remembering something.

The Baron politely took his leave and rowed back across the lake.

Irma took the road that led homeward. She wished to visit Walpurga's relatives and enquired as to the route towards the lake on the other side of the mountains. They told her that a carriage could not get there, and that the only way to reach the point was on horseback. Irma took the direct road for home.

CHAPTER XII.

"SOMETHING ails me! It always seems as if some one were calling me, and I can't help looking round to see who it is. The Countess must be thinking of us all the time. Ah me, she's the best creature in the world."

Whilst Walpurga, for many days, thus lamented Irma's departure, the others at the palace rarely thought of her. The place we leave, be it to journey in this or to the other world, is speedily filled. In the palace, they tolerate neither vacancies nor sentiment. There, life is a part of history; and history, as we all know, never stands still.

Mademoiselle Kramer continued to teach Walpurga how to write, and the latter did not understand her, when she said:

"The quality are fond of taking up all sorts of things, but we must finish what we begin. I've finished many a piece of embroidery, of which the hand that was kissed for it scarcely worked a couple of stitches; but that's in the order of things."

Although Mademoiselle Kramer found everything in order that was done by the quality, she, nevertheless, had a habit of speaking of such things to her inferiors, not with the hope of being understood by them, but merely to relieve her mind.

The child was well and hearty. Day after day passed in quiet routine, and now Walpurga was richly recompensed for the absence of Countess Irma. The queen was permitted to have the nurse and child about her for several hours every day.

While Irma had gone forth to seek rest and quiet, but had found chaos instead, the queen's life had become serene and happy. Her recent experience of life's trials had been a novel and difficult one; but now her mind was at rest, her health restored. She would look at her child and, when she spoke, Walpurga would fold her hands and listen in silence. The nurse did not understand all that was said but, nevertheless, sympathized with what was going on. The queen endeavored to console Doctor Gunther in his affliction, and spoke to him of the consolation that the mother could find in her child: "In spite of all life's contradictions and enigmas," said she, "there is yet the one glad thought that every child bears within it the possibility of the highest human development."

The queen, while speaking, looked around at her child, and Walpurga said, in a gentle voice:

"Look at our child; it's laughing for the first time. It's seven weeks old to-day."

"I've seen my child's first smile, and its father is not here."

"Do n't make such a long face," said Walpurga; "just keep on laughing and he'll laugh, too; your pleasant glances will bide in his face."

The child kept smiling until the doctor requested them not to excite it any more. He said that Walpurga was right, and that if one looks at an infant kindly it has the effect of imprinting a sweet expression upon its features.

From that day forward, the child never saw a sad look on its mother's face.

It was only when she spoke of persons that Walpurga could talk volubly and continuously. Countess Irma was therefore frequently the topic of conversation. But this subject was soon exhausted, and when the queen would say: "Why are you silent? I hear that you can talk to the child so prettily and carry on all sorts of fun with him," Walpurga persistently remained silent.

The queen made Walpurga tell her her history. It required much questioning to get at the entire story, for Walpurga could not narrate it in a continuous strain, as she had never thought of her life as a connected whole. Everything had gone on of its own accord, as it were, and without requiring one to stop and think. While telling her story, she was as anxious as if before a court of justice.

"How did you happen to fall in love with your husband? Do you love him with all your heart?"

"Of course. He's my husband and there is n't a bad drop of blood in him. He's a little awkward,—I mean unhandy,—but only when others are about. He's never been much among people. He grew up in a one-storied house and until he was twenty-two years old had seen nothing but trees; but no work's too hard for him and whatever you put him to, he does his duty. He's not so dull, either; but he does n't show it to the world; with me, he can talk well enough, and he's satisfied as long as I know he's the right sort of man. It takes my Hansei a long while to make up his mind, but when he's made it up, he's always right. You see, dear queen, I might have got a much cleverer husband; my playmate has a hunter, and his comrade was after me for a long while; but I did n't want to have anything to do with him, for he's too much in love with himself. He once rowed over the lake with me, and was all the time looking at himself in the water, and twisting his moustache and making mouths, and so thought I to myself: If your clothes were made of gold, I would n't have you. And when father was drowned in the lake, Hansei was at hand and did everything about the house. He'd go out in his skiff and bring in fish, and, while I and mother would sell 'em, he'd work in the forest. Father was also woodcutter and fisherman, at the same time. And so Hansei was there a full half year; no one bid him come and no one told him to go, but he was there and was honest and good and never gave me an unkind word; and so we were married, and, thank God, we're happy and, through our good prince, we'll have something of our own. We've got it already, and it's no easy matter for a husband to give his wife away for a year. But Hansei did n't waste many words over it. If a thing's right and must be, he only nods—this way—and then it's done. Forgive me, dear queen, for telling you all this silly stuff, but you asked me."

"No, I am heartily glad that there are simple-minded, happy beings in this world. The worldly-wise think they prove their infinite wisdom when they say: 'There are no simple-minded, happy people, and the country folk are not nearly so good as we imagine'."

"No more they are," said Walpurga, eagerly; "there are n't any worse people than some of those out our way. There are good ones, of course; but there are wicked and envious and thieving and lazy and good-for-nothing and godless creatures besides; and Zenza and Thomas are among the worst, but I can't help it."

Walpurga imagined that the queen must know of the pardon, and they should not say of her that she had not told the truth. The queen felt grieved at Walpurga's vehemence and the serious charges she made against the people of her neighborhood.

After a little while, she said to Walpurga:

"They tell me you sing so beautifully. Sing something for me, or, rather, for the child."

"No, dear queen, I can't do it. I'd like to, but I can't. I do n't know any but silly songs. The good ones are all church songs."

"Sing me one of those that you call silly songs."

"No, I can't; they're lonely songs."

"What do you mean by lonely songs?"

"I do n't know, but that's what they call 'em."

"Ah, I understand: they can only be sung when one is solitary and alone."

"Yes, I suppose that's it; the queen's right."

Although the queen endeavored to induce her to sing, Walpurga protested that she could not and finally became so agitated that she burst into tears. The queen experienced some difficulty in pacifying her, but succeeded at last, and then Walpurga, taking the child with her, returned to her room.

On the following day Walpurga was again summoned to the queen, who said: "You're right, Walpurga. You can't sing to me. I've been thinking a great deal about you. The bird on the tree does n't sing at one's bidding. Free nature cannot be directed by a baton. You need n't sing for me. I shall not ask it of you again."

Walpurga had intended to sing to the queen that day. She had chosen her prettiest songs, and now the queen actually ordered her not to sing, and even compared her to a bird. "Palace folk," thought she, "are queer folk."

"I understand," continued the queen, "that in your neighborhood they believe in the Lady of the Lake. Do you believe in her, too?"

"Believe in her? I do n't know, but they tell of her. Father saw her three days before he died, and that was a sure sign that he would soon die. They say, too, that she's the Lady of Waldeck."

"Who is the Lady of Waldeck?"

"She's the Lady of Wörth."

"What is Wörth?"

"A bit of land in the middle of the lake, with water all round it."

"Do you mean an island?"

"Yes, an island; we sometimes call it that, too."

"And what is the story of the Lady of Waldeck?"

"Once upon a time, many thousand years ago, there was a man, and he was a knight by the name of Waldeck, and he was a crusader. He and lots of emperors and kings went off to our Savior's grave in the Holy Land. He left his wife at home and before he went away, he said to her: 'You're good and you'll

remain true to me ;' and when, after many years, he returned, quite black with the eastern sun, he found his wife with another man, and so he bound the two together, put them in a boat and rowed them over to Wörth where he left them ; and there they lay and had nothing to eat, and nothing to drink, and were tied together and died of hunger, and the birds of the air ate them. They were adulterers and it served them right ; but he was horrible for all. And even nowadays, on spirit nights, you can often see a little blue flame on the island of Wörth, and they say that the Lady of Waldeck's soul has passed into a nymph and that she must wander about."

Such was Walpurga's story.

"I have n't frightened you, I hope?" said she, anxiously, as she observed the queen's fixed gaze. "That's what they say. But may be it's only talk, after all."

"No, no. Do n't be anxious about that," cried the queen. "So many different thoughts pass through my mind."

"Like enough ; it's very hard to be the housewife, with so big a house as this to keep, and so many folk in it."

The queen laughed heartily.

Walpurga did not know that she had said anything odd or droll and was therefore surprised at the effect of her remarks ; but she soon became satisfied that all she said was quoted. This made her quite shy, although she would now and then give way to fits of extravagance and would, at such moments, delight in her own odd freaks, for they always provoked a smile. While the queen aimed to be as simple as possible in her intercourse with Walpurga, the latter was, with each succeeding day, becoming more artificial and affected. She copied herself and her whilom *naïveté*. When she knew that the queen was within hearing, she would repeat the wondrous combination of words with which she was wont to amuse the prince. She one day began to sing of her own accord and, when she had finished, she felt surprised and almost hurt, because her song had elicited no remark from the queen. Had she not sung well?

The queen had said nothing, because she feared that she might embarrass her.

There was a strange contrast between these two women, each of whom was trying to place herself in more perfect sympathy with the other, while both were, with every step, adding to the distance that separated them.

It was a great day when the queen, accompanied by Walpurga and the crown prince, rode out for the first time.

"You're a thousand times more beautiful when you're out of doors, in the open air. In the darkened rooms, I never knew how beautiful you were," said Walpurga to the queen, who immediately

afterward had something to say in French to the Countess Brinkenstein, who sat beside her.

"May I ask a favor, gracious queen?" said Walpurga.

"Certainly. What is it?"

"I think it hurts the child to talk gibberish before it. A young soul like his understands, even if it can't speak, and it seems to me it must confuse his little brain. I hardly know how to tell you; but I feel it in my own head, and whatever affects me, affects the child."

"She's right," said the queen to Countess Brinkenstein, "until the child can speak perfectly, it should hear no language but its mother tongue."

"That's it—mother tongue," exclaimed Walpurga, "you've hit it. I had it on my lips, but I could n't think of it; that's the very word. I'm, so to say, the same as a mother to the child and so—is n't it so?"

"Yes, certainly. It shall be as you say in all things. See to it, my dear Brinkenstein, that after this, nothing but German be spoken before the prince. No one can tell what sounds may sink into the soul which, as yet, is but half awakened."

Walpurga was delighted. There would now be no more gibberish when she was by; for wherever the child was, there was she.

Mademoiselle Kramer added to her happiness by informing her that they would start for the country, that is, the summer palace, within a few days.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the meanwhile there was a special reason for detaining Walpurga and the prince in the city.

Baron Schoning had spoken of the matter, while at breakfast one day, and the suggestion which had been offered as a bit of pleasantry was well received. The millions who were anxious to behold their future ruler were to be gratified by the work of an instant. It was determined that there should be a photograph of the crown prince borne aloft on the hands of the people, Walpurga representing the people. She urged various objections to the idea, and said it was wrong to let a child less than a year old look into a mirror, and quite wrong to have its likeness taken. "As long as you have n't let a child look in the glass, it can see itself in the hollow of its left hand." Finding that her opposition was of no avail, she dressed herself in her best gown. The crown prince looked very pretty, and as he already had fair curly hair, the artist removed his cap.

The first few attempts to get the likeness were failures. Whenever she heard the voice issuing from the dark room, Walpurga was frightened and imagined that witchery was going on. She

became more and more agitated, but at last, at Schoning's clever suggestion, a pianist in the adjoining room played the air of Walpurga's favorite song. As soon as she heard it, she could not help joining in the strain. Her expression—and that of the child, too—became cheerful and unconstrained. Eureka! the picture was a success.

The drives about the city had been lovely, but the most beautiful of all was now to come.

It was a bright, balmy afternoon when they drove off. Although there had been no rain for some time, the road was free from dust, sprinklers having preceded the court carriage.

Walpurga was in an open carriage, with the prince and the queen. It was the first time that she rode out among the villages and the fields. She gazed at the people who were looking out of the windows, or sitting at the doorsteps of the houses by the roadside, at the children who would stop and salute them, and then, again, at the laborers in the fields. She kept smiling, nodding and winking in all directions. The queen asked:

"What ails you? What's the matter?"

"Oh, pardon me, queen; but here I'm riding in a carriage and four, and over there the likes of me are working and toiling, and I know how the women's backs ache from digging up potatoes, and while I ride by, as though I were somebody better than they, it makes me feel as if I ought to ask 'em all to forgive me for riding by in this way. I feel as if I ought to say: 'Never mind; when the year's over, I'll be the same as you are; the clothes I wear, the carriage and the horses, none of 'em are mine; they're all borrowed.' Ah, dear queen, forgive me for saying this to you, but you understand everything and know how to explain it for the best. I empty my whole heart out to you," said Walpurga, smiling.

"Yes, I understand what you mean," replied the queen; "and it is wise of you thus to look forward to a return to your home. The thought that you might be unable to content yourself there, has often troubled me. Believe me, we who ride in carriages are no better off than those who are walking barefoot through yonder stubble."

"I know it," said Walpurga. "No one can eat more than his fill, as my father used to say, and queens must bear their children in pain and sorrow, just like the rest of us; no one can save them from that."

The queen made no reply, and looked out of the other side of the carriage.

Countess Brinkenstein motioned Walpurga to be silent; for, while it was difficult to induce her to talk, when she had once begun, she did not know when to stop.

The queen was only silent because she wished to say something

in French, to Countess Brinkenstein, and had refrained from doing so on account of Walpurga's previous admonition.

"My dear child," said the queen at last, "I would gladly give up everything, if I knew that I could thereby render mankind happy and contented. But what good would it do? Money would n't help the people, and it is not we who have brought about this inequality. God has ordained it thus."

Walpurga could easily have answered her, but thought it best to leave something for the morrow; for her father had often said: "It is n't well to catch all the fish in one day." She, therefore, remained silent.

The queen felt greatly constrained by her promise not to speak French in Walpurga's presence. There was much that she desired to say and with which the peasant woman had no concern.

"How beautiful! how lovely is the world," she murmured to herself, and then closed her eyes, as if fatigued with the splendor which had opened before them, after her long seclusion. And while she lay there, her head thrown back on the cushion, she looked like a sleeping angel, so peaceful, so tender, as if mother and child in one.

"The soft cushions almost made me think I was sitting on clouds," said Walpurga, when they reached their journey's end.

She was unspeakably happy in the country. The broad prospect, the clear skies, the mountains, the large and beautiful garden with its comfortable seats, the fountains, the swans—all delighted her. There was also a fine dairy-farm, about a quarter of a mile distant, where the cow-stable was much finer than the dancing floor at the Chamois inn.

Walpurga was out in the open air during the greater part of the day. The queen lived for her child alone, and Walpurga was again talkative and natural. All the affected ways that she had acquired while in the city, had left her.

In her first letter home—she could now write for herself—she said:

"If I only had you here for one day, to tell you about everything; for, if the sky were nothing but paper and our lake nothing but ink, I could n't write it all. If it were only not so far off, Han-sei; a pound of fish here costs twice as much as with us. We're living in the summer palace now, and just think, mother, what such a king has. He has seven palaces, and they're all furnished, every one with a hundred beds, rooms, kitchens and all of them filled, and when they go from one palace to another they need n't take a fork or a spoon along. Everything here is silver, and the doctor and the apothecary and the preacher and the court people and the horses and the carriages, all move out here with us. There's a whole town here in the palace, and I've the best beer and more than I care for; and when one gets up in the morning everything

is as neat and clean as a new-laid egg. There's not a leaf on the paths, and then there's a house all made with glass. The flowers live in it; but I dare n't go in, because it's too hot in there. They keep it heated the whole year round, and it's filled with great palms and other trees from the east and, in the pond, there's a fountain, and the water rises up as high as our church steeple. And just think of all such a king can have. All day long, when the sun shines, there's a rainbow there, sometimes above and sometimes below. Of course, he nor no one else can make the sun; and they all do their best to please me. I hardly can say I like a thing, before they give it to me at once.

"The queen is just like a companion with me. Just like you, Stasi. I wish you much joy at your wedding. I only heard of it from Zenza. You shall have a wedding present from me; let me know what you'd like to have. But now I beg of you, just tell me how it goes with my child. It did n't please me to know that you had weighed it on the butcher's scales, and that it's so heavy. I would n't have thought, mother, that you would have allowed it, or that you, Hansei, would have given way to the innkeeper. Beware of that fellow. It was only last night that I dreamt you and he were rowing across the lake, and that he clutched you and dragged you into the water. Then all was over. And then the Lady of the Lake appeared, and she looked like the good Countess who is now away. She's the best friend I have here, and promised to visit you on her way back. You can tell her and give her everything just as if it was myself. They've just brought me my dinner. Ah, dear mother, if I could only give you some of it. There are so many good things here and there's always so much left. Do n't let yourself want for anything, or Hansei either, and my child least of all, for we can now afford it, thank God! And I want to be with you for a long while yet, dear mother. It often makes me feel bad that I can't be a mother—I mean a true mother; but when I come home I'll make it all up to my child; and Hansei, put all the money out at interest until I get home; remember, it does n't belong to us, but to our child whom we deprive of its mother.

"Mademoiselle Kramer, who is with me all day, was born here. She'd rather be in the city, and she says it used to be much prettier here than it now is; that everything used to be like the little garden yonder, where there are walls and rooms with doors and windows, all made of shrubbery. It's all very pretty and I like to go there, but when I've been there a few minutes I am almost frightened to death; for I feel as if I and the trees were bewitched, and I get away as soon as I can. Mademoiselle Kramer is a very good person, but nothing is quite to her taste. She's been used all her life to riding and fine eating and sitting about; and mother, just think of what I have eaten here—live ice! People here are so

clever they can preserve ice and make it up so that you can eat it. Yes, if that could satisfy one's appetite, there would n't be any hungry people with us in the winter, or even in the summer, further up the mountains. And mother, you once told me a fairy-tale about walls that have ears; but this is no fable, it's true and quite natural. They have speaking trumpets running through the whole palace, and you can speak through them, and if I want anything in my room, all I've got to do is to go up to the wall and say so and in a minute it's there.

"This is a beautiful day and that makes me think that you have it as well as we, and that the same sun that shines on us here shines on you, too,

"The main business here is taking walks. Every one must take walks here. They call it taking exercise, so that they can get up their appetite and keep their limbs from getting stiff. They even take the horses out walking when there's nothing for them to do. Early in the morning, the grooms ride out a long way with them and then come home. I often wish the horses could only take me home for an hour. I often get homesick, but I am well and hearty and only hope it is the same with you. Your

"WALPURGA.

"Postscript.—Why have n't you mentioned a word about the little gold heart which my Countess sent to my Burgei? And no one is to send me any more petitions, or to come to me. I won't receive another one. As long as I live, I'll be sorry for having anything to do with Zenza and Thomas; but perhaps it's all for the best and may be he's turned out better. Do n't think hard of it, dear Hansei, but I beg you, once more, to have very little to do with the host of the Chamois. He's a rogue, and a dangerous one at that, but you need n't tell him that I say so, for I want the ill-will of no one. I send my love to all good friends. I must stop now, my hand is quite stiff with writing.

"Stop! I must begin again. I send you a picture of myself and my prince. It was taken in a sort of peep-show, before we came out here, and now, as long as the world lasts, the prince and I will always be together, and I'll be holding him in my arms. But I am still with you, dear Hansei, and you, dear mother, and, most of all, with my dear child that I bear in my heart where no one can look. Don't show the picture to any one.

"But, dear me! what good will it do if you don't show it? Mademoiselle Kramer tells me that they've made a hundred thousand pictures of me and the prince, and now I am hanging up in all the shops, and wherever I go they know me as well as the king and the queen, whose pictures hang next to mine. I feel as if I wanted no one ever to see me again, but when I think of it, it's really an honor after all. I am out in the world now, and must let them do what they please with me.

"But I shall ever be true to you, and I am at home nowhere but with you, and am always there in thought."

CHAPTER XIV.

"HOW goes it, Walpurga?" asked Baum, one morning, when the nurse was looking out of the window of the ground floor.

"Oh dear," replied she, "this is a real paradise."

"Indeed!"

"Could it be any finer in paradise? The people live without care and have nothing to do but eat and drink and laugh and go out walking."

"You're right there; but still it was finer in paradise, for there father Adam could n't covet another man's wife, as his was the only one in the world."

"What queer notions you have," said Walpurga, laughing; and Baum, feeling flattered, added:

"In paradise they had no use for servants, no coachman, no cook, no house, no clothes. There were no boots to be cleaned, because there were none, and there were no coats and shirts to be woven, and sewed and mended."

"You dreadful creature," exclaimed Walpurga. She felt as if Baum's words had almost torn the clothes from her; her face was crimson. Baum quickly answered:

"I'm sorry I look so dreadful in your eyes. In my eyes you're so beautiful that I—" He was interrupted by a servant who called him away.

Walpurga quickly drew back into the room. She was angry at Baum. How could any one use such language to a married woman? "And yet," thought she, with a self-complacent smile, "Baum's a well-mannered person, after all; and why should n't one crack a joke, now and then?"

She looked in the large mirror for a moment and smiled.

"Yes, when Hansei sees you again, he'll hardly know you; it's the good living that does it. But I'll say to myself every day: 'It won't last long; you're only hired here for awhile. But dancing's pleasant, even if the dance does n't last long,'" said Walpurga, as if to console herself. All sorts of dance tunes occurred to her and she kept humming them to the prince.

Walpurga roamed about through the beautiful park as if in a dream. She imagined that the trees, the sky and the birds were all enchanted and in a strange world; that they would suddenly awaken and all would vanish. But everything went on in its quiet course, each day as beautiful as the one that preceded, like the sun rising anew every day, the flowers that are constantly giving forth their fragrance, or the spring that never ceases to flow.

Walpurga had a special liking for Mademoiselle Kramer's father, who was governor of the castle. He was a venerable man who raised lovely flowers in his little lodge, and she could talk to him as with her own father.

Walpurga was sitting out of doors for the greater part of the day. Mademoiselle Kramer was always with her and two servants within ready call. The queen would also often join them.

The queen had a beautiful snow-white setter of which the child was especially fond. Walpurga requested her to let the prince often have the dog, because it is well for a child to have a living animal about it.

"She is right," said the queen, addressing the court lady at her side; "animal life awakens human consciousness."

Walpurga stared at her in surprise. The queen had said she was right, but added words that she did not understand.

"Just look," said she to the queen, "how fond the bees are of our child. They won't hurt him—you need n't fear. The bee is the only creature that came out of paradise without being spoilt."

The queen manifested her pleasure at the manner in which Walpurga's thoughts were interwoven with tradition.

Walpurga observed that the queen had but little worldly wisdom, and gave her the benefit of hers whenever opportunity presented itself.

"Do you know what that is?" she once asked, while they sat in the shrubbery.

"A tree."

"Yes, but do you know it's a sacred tree and that lightning does n't strike where it grows?"

"No, I never knew that."

"And then of course, you do n't know why. Now my mother told me all about it. The Virgin was once crossing a mountain and was caught in a fearful storm. So she stood under a great large hazel tree and remained safe, and, because it had protected her, she blessed it for all time. You can make magic wands from hazel twigs. The serpent-king dwells under the hazel tree and, sometimes, under the weeping willow. Do you know why the weeping willow drops its branches so sadly?"

"No, I do n't know that either. You're full of wisdom," said the queen, smiling.

"I'm not, but my mother is. I do n't know half as much as she. She's very clever, and told me about the weeping willow. The rods with which they scourged our Savior were made from the weeping willow, and ever since that time she droops her branches with shame."

Walpurga was quite happy to think that she could teach the queen something. She felt that she was quite a different being from all in the palace and that the queen was the only one who

understood her. She was always happy and cheerful when with her and opened her whole heart to the queen. "You're quite a stranger in the world; you've never, in all your life, seen how the burghers and farmers sit in their rooms of an evening, what they eat, what they talk of, what they wish for, and what makes them happy or gives them pain. I once heard my father tell a story. It was about a prince and a princess who grew up as shepherds, and did n't know who they were until they were grown up, when they said to him: 'you're a prince,' and to her: 'you're a princess,' and they became right good and honest people. Of course they'd been out in the world, and had learnt how people live and what they need. I only wish that we could send our prince out, the same way. I think it would be good for him and the whole country, too. If servants are running after you all day long, it's just as if you were in a prison, the people form a living wall around you."

"We can all be honest and good," replied the queen.

"And make good men and women of our children," added Walpurga. "Do you know what I'd like? I'd like, as long as I live, to take all trouble from you, and if sickness came to you, to be sick in your place."

"Yes, that's very well; but let us be quiet now."

The queen was all happiness. She saw to the bottom of a simple peasant woman's heart, and into a new world that revealed itself to her in her child.

CHAPTER XV.

BAUM availed himself of every opportunity to speak with Walpurga. He was in deep affliction; his wife was seriously ill, and Walpurga endeavored to console him. In return, Baum lent a willing ear to all her complaints, for she had just heard from home, that Zenza denied all knowledge of the little golden heart that Countess Irma had sent to the child.

"Ah, and so your Countess has a golden heart left to give away," said Baum in a mocking voice. "You ought to be glad to have such a friend."

"And so I am. Oh, if she were only here again, then it would be a real paradise. I do n't worry about Zenza's making away with the golden heart; there must be some bad people, or else the world would be too beautiful."

"And I tell you, it's only half a life when the king's away. Just wait till he comes back and see how it will be then. When there's no man about, it is n't a complete house."

The queen approached and Baum withdrew.

"What was that man saying to you?" asked the queen.

"We were telling each other of our troubles; he has great long-

ing for the king and I, dear queen, have great longing for my Countess Irma."

"I long for her, too; but she has asked to have her leave of absence extended for another fortnight."

Peacefully and calmly, the days passed by. Walpurga's favorite resort was in the neighborhood of the dairy-farm; for there were cows there, and cows are the same everywhere, and do n't know that they belong to the king, or that their milk is served at his table.

Walpurga remarked this one day to Baum, who had discovered that he could meet her there, and he replied:

"Oh, how clever you are; if I only had got a wife like you."

"There are dozens like me."

"Oh, not so clever as you are. You could get far in the world, if you only wanted to."

"How far should I go?" said Walpurga. "I want to go home and no farther."

"No one will think the worse of you for that, but one can make a new home."

"I do n't understand you."

"I can't explain now, Countess Brinkenstein is coming. Meet me in the shrubbery behind the chapel, this evening when they're all at table, I've something good to tell you."

Walpurga had not time to reply. Baum saw Countess Brinkenstein approaching and, in a loud voice, gave the dairy inspector an order from the head cook, and then walked away quickly, respectfully saluting the Countess as he passed.

Countess Brinkenstein administered a severe reproof to Mademoiselle Kramer for having allowed Walpurga to stand there with the prince, and chatter with the servants.

Mademoiselle Kramer made no reply, and only motioned Walpurga to go into the vine-clad arbor.

Walpurga was busy conjecturing what sort of advice Baum might have to give her. He knew lots of things and perhaps knew of some clever stroke, by which Hansei, her mother and the child might be brought to the palace. But Hansei would n't do for a lackey. Perhaps, though, they could make him court fisherman or chief woodsman of the royal forest.

When evening came, she was quite uneasy. It was not the right thing for her to have a secret meeting with any man but her husband; but, perhaps the place may be given away to-morrow, and then it would be too late. She sat by the window and looked up at the stars. Her cheeks glowed, she drew a deep breath.

"What ails you?" inquired Mademoiselle Kramer.

"I feel so warm and oppressed."

"I'll send for the doctor."

"I do n't need the doctor. Just let me sit here quietly. But

no ; let me walk up and down in the garden for a few minutes and I'll feel better."

"The maid can go with you."

"No, I do n't need any one ; I'll feel better if I go alone."

"But, I beg of you, do n't go too far, and come back soon. You've seen, to-day, how every misstep of yours draws reproof on me."

"Yes, I'll come back soon."

Walpurga went out at the back door. The gravel grated under her footsteps and she trod more lightly. The air was laden with the perfume of the flowers ; the swans in the lake uttered a strange sound, like a deep, muffled trumpet tone ; the sky sparkled with countless stars and, just as Walpurga looked up, she saw a brilliant meteor and exclaimed : "Hansei !"

In her innermost heart she wished for nothing but her husband's happiness. She stopped when she had uttered his name. She felt as if she had better return. She was a married woman and ought n't to meet a strange man at night, even though it was by the chapel.

Something ran across the path. Was it a cat, a martin or a weasel ?

"Return," said an inner voice, but she went on, nevertheless. She reached the arbor. Baum stepped forth from behind a vine-clad column. He held out both his hands to her and she offered him her own. He tried to draw her closer to him, but she stood firm.

"What have you to tell me ?" asked Walpurga.

"Nothing but what's good. You see, we lesser folks must help each other, and you're so much to me that I could do anything for you."

"If you can do me a good service, I shall be grateful as long as I live—I and my husband and my child. Tell me quick ; I'm in a hurry."

"Then we can leave it for some other time."

"No, tell me now. What do you mean ?"

"I really meant nothing at all, but you see we must always wait on others, and so I thought that we might have a quarter of an hour to ourselves. I only wanted to tell you that you are the light of my life, my happiness. When I look at you, and listen to you, I'd like to do—I do n't know what, and I can't tell."

"It is n't necessary, either ; and, let me tell you, this is very wicked of you."

"Is it wicked that I love you to distraction ?"

"Yes, and doubly wicked that you fooled me here and made me believe that you had something good to tell me."

"And so I have," said Baum, quickly ; "forgive me for what I've done ; if you do, I'll tell you the rest."

"Yes, I'll forgive you, but make haste."

"Well," said Baum, with great composure, "it's simply this. He who stands at the manger and does n't eat, is a fool. Do you understand me?"

"Of course; it does n't take much to know that."

"Yes, but you do n't take my meaning. A court like this is a full manger, and you'll be a great fool if you go away without having taken enough to satisfy yourself and your child for life."

"I'd like to know how that can be done. You've got to eat every day, and can't stuff yourself with enough to last for a lifetime."

"You're clever, but you might be more so. Just listen! What I mean is this. A good position, or a profitable situation, should give one a chance to make himself comfortable for life. The tenant of the dairy-farm will have to leave next spring or, at the latest, in the fall, and I think you ought to manage it with the queen and the rest of them, so that your husband should get the position, and then you could be here all your life and you and yours would be well provided for."

"Take my word for it, I know what the quality are. If you leave here without having secured a good situation, not a cat will remember you. But if you remain here, you'll be well taken care of to the end of your days, and the older the prince gets, the more he'll think of you; and when he becomes king, he'll provide for you, your family, your child and even your grandchildren. Is that wicked advice?"

"No; on the contrary, it's very good and I'll remember it. That, indeed, would be bread and lots of butter."

"Oh, I've never seen or heard so sensible a woman as you are. You deserve a better lot; but that can't be helped, and if you remain here, I'll often have the pleasure of seeing you and speaking a word with you, for I hope we'll be good friends; shall we not?"

"Yes, indeed, and my Hansei will also be a good friend to you. There's not a false drop of blood in his body, and he's clever, too, only he's not much of a talker; and he loves me just as much as gold; he's true and kind-hearted, and I won't let any one say a word against him."

"I have n't said anything against him," replied Baum, and Walpurga was obliged to admit that this was the case; nevertheless, she could not help feeling that any offer of love to another man's wife is an insult to her husband, for it implies as plainly as words can express it: "He is not the right man, for he has such and such faults; I alone am worthy of you."

Sighing deeply, Baum answered:

"Oh, if one could only double his life."

"I should think one life was enough for any man."

"Certainly, if one has n't wasted it. One can only live once, you know."

"Yes, in this world ; but in the next it begins anew."

"I mean in this world, too. But it's very hard, let me tell you, if one's whole life has been wasted through a stupid blunder. Must one bear with it and make no attempt to change it? We've both of us blundered."

"Who?"

"While I was a soldier, I became acquainted with the valet of the late king. He was very fond of me and took great pleasure in helping me forward; but he well knew what he was about. I thought it a wonderful piece of luck, when I found I was to marry his daughter. It was only too late, when I discovered that she was sickly and irritable and without a healthy drop of blood in her body. And is my whole life to be wasted, because of this blunder? And is no love left for me in the world? And with you, it's just the same; with both of us, you and I—but why should it be too late, even now?"

"Pretty jokes, indeed! but they're not to my taste. It's wrong to talk about such things."

"I'm not joking. Are all of earth's joys to be lost to us, just because we have once blundered? In that case, we'd be doubly fools."

"I see you're in earnest."

"Certainly I am," said Baum, his voice trembling with emotion.

"Very well, then. Just listen to what I've got to say. How can you dare insult my Hansei, that way? If it were so—and it is n't—but suppose it were; do you think, even if you were better looking or better mannered than my Hansei, and you're far from being that, let me tell you.—But that does n't matter one way or the other. There's not a better man living than my Hansei, and even if there be one, he's nothing to me; we're husband and wife and belong to each other.—But it was only a joke, after all, was n't it? and a mighty stupid one at that. Say that you only meant it for fun, for if I thought you were in earnest, I'd never speak another word to you; and now—Good night."

"No, wait a moment. Now that I know how good you are, I think so much the more of you. If I only had a wife like you!"

Baum was greatly agitated. He had at first only dallied with kind words, but his voice had gradually assumed an agitated and touching tone.

"I'll give you something," said Walpurga, placing her hand on his shoulder.

"What is it; a kiss?"

"Get out! Don't talk so. You've just been behaving so well. Now I'll tell you something that my mother taught me. She always says, that he who is not contented with what he has, would be dissatisfied even if he had what he wished for."

"Did your mother tell you that?"

"Yes, and she knows many other good sayings, and I am glad that this one will be of use to you; it 'll do you good."

"Of course—but now give me just one kiss, because I 've been so good."

"What a foolish fellow you are," said Walpurga; "you say you 're good, and, the very next minute, want something wicked as a reward. I 'm a married woman and, if you were to give me a whole palace with all that 's in it and seven palaces besides, I 'd not kiss any man but my husband. There, I 'll shake hands with you—and now—good night."

They parted, with a mutual promise to remain good friends.

Walpurga found Mademoiselle Kramer in great trouble. The child was crying, and would not be pacified until Walpurga sang to it.

Meanwhile, Baum returned to the palace. He bit his lips with vexation and thought to himself: What a simple, stupid creature such a peasant woman is. And she is beautiful; I can wait; I know the long road; she shall be tamed yet.

For many days, Walpurga would pass Baum without looking up, and he, too, seemed shy; but one day, when she was sitting on the bench, he quickly said while passing:

"You need n't be angry at me; I did n't know I 'd offended you and, if I have, I ask your pardon."

Walpurga looked up as if relieved. Baum nodded to her and hurried away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE king had returned from the baths. He was received with great ceremony, but he and the queen soon withdrew from the company and repaired to the crown prince's apartments. The parents, clasping hands, stood by the cradle of the sleeping child. Their glances rested upon each other and then upon the prince.

"Can there be a higher joy than thus to behold the babe whose life belongs to and is a part of our own?" softly whispered the queen.

The king embraced her.

The child awoke; his cheeks were glowing, his eyes were bright.

In the meanwhile, Walpurga had been sitting in a corner, weeping silently; but now she was obliged to go to the child. The king left; the queen remained with her.

"You 've been crying?" asked the queen.

"It was for joy, nothing but joy. Could anything be more beautiful than the way you stood together there?"

"I 'll have your husband come to you," replied the queen; "write him to come, and say that your mother and child may come too."

"Yes, dear queen, it would be very nice, but it would cost a pretty penny."

Surprised that any one was obliged to deny himself a pleasure, because of the expense, the queen looked up and said :

"Go to the paymaster and get the money. Would a hundred florins be enough?"

"Oh! More than enough! But if the queen would give me the money, we could make better use of it."

The queen looked at Walpurga, as if shocked to think that, even in simple hearts, avarice can destroy the noblest emotions.

Walpurga observed the change in the queen's expression and said :

"I'll tell you, honestly, why I do n't want it, even if it cost nothing. My husband's a good man, but he's just a little bit awkward, and it would grieve him to the heart if any one were to laugh at him. And it would be too much to expect of mother, for she's over sixty years old, and has n't been out of the village since her wedding-day—that is, not farther than Hohenheiligen, three miles from our place, where she went on a pilgrimage. Though it would only be a day's journey, she has n't even once gone home in all that time; and so I think it might do her harm if she were taken anywhere else, even if it were only for a few days. The best thing would be if we could all of us remain near the king. I'm sure we'd take good care of the dairy-farm. My husband knows all about cattle; he was cowboy for many years, and, afterwards, herdsman on the mountain meadows."

Walpurga spoke as if the queen knew all about the plan, but the queen was so possessed with the thought of her domestic happiness, that she did not hear a word of what was said.

Days passed by, and Walpurga, who had received none of the traveling money that the queen had promised her, did not venture to ask the court paymaster for it. Desirous of showing Baum that she was still on friendly terms with him, she told him what had happened.

"The best thing you can do," said he, with a shrewd air, "is not to take so small a gift. If you do, they'll think they've done with you; don't lose sight of the main chance, and that's the farm."

Walpurga was sincerely grateful to Baum. It was very fortunate, she thought, to have a friend at the palace, who, while the king was yet a prince, had traveled with him through Italy and France, and who knew how one ought to deal with such high folk.

The palace seemed to have thrown off its tranquil ways of the last few weeks. All was life and bustle. Sounds of laughter and of song could be heard from early morn until late at night. Gay colored lamps hung from the trees and, at night, the sparkling lights seemed, in the distance, as if part of a fairy-scene.

Early in the morning, wagons laden with provisions could be seen going hither and thither. To-day, the court would dine on some wooded height; to-morrow, in a ravine, or near a waterfall.

The king was all kindness and attention to his wife, and the queen had never seemed more lovely in his eyes, than now, elevated as she was by maternal happiness and conjugal affection.

In the apartments occupied by Walpurga and Mademoiselle Kramer, none of this bustle of preparation or departure was heard. They simply knew that "all had gone off, for the day."

In the morning, while the day was still young, and in the evening, while the soft dews were falling, the king and queen, arm in arm, might often have been seen sauntering in the park, and at such times the ladies and gentlemen would remain near the palace.

One evening, while the king and queen were thus walking together, engaged in familiar conversation, the queen said:

"How delightful it is to be thus leaning on your arm; to close one's eyes and be led by you. You can't imagine what good it does me."

Although the king expressed himself delighted with her devotion, an inner voice told him that such sensibility was unqueenly. How differently—

No, he would not permit himself to think of it.

The queen had much to tell him of the gradual dawning of sense in the prince. He listened attentively, but rather through politeness than sympathy. After the first week, the queen excused herself from taking part in the frequent excursions, for she found no pleasure in all the bustle.

The queen had Walpurga and the child with her, either in the park or on the rising ground behind the palace, where she would sketch groups of trees, the lake and the swans, the castle, the chapel, and various distant views.

One morning, while at breakfast, the king said:

"What charming rivalry it was when you and Countess Irma were drawing together. Your dispositions were both illustrated by the way in which you treated the same subjects."

"Yes, we often remarked that. Perhaps I worked in the details more correctly and sharply, while Countess Irma sketched with far greater ease and freedom. I greatly miss the dear Countess."

"Then let us write to her and tell her that she must return, and that at once. Let us send her a joint letter. Ladies and gentlemen, we shall now, all of us, write a letter to Countess Irma."

"Order the writing materials to be brought," said he to one of the gentlemen in waiting. His request was speedily complied with and he wrote:

"Beautiful Countess! Fugitive bird! At last I know what bird you are:—The wild dove. Does this contradiction describe you?"

Wild, and yet a dove? Come, do come to us; your forest companions hang their heads because of your absence. Hasten to us, on wings of song."

The king offered the sheet to the queen and said: "What will you write?"

"I can't write when any one is present," replied the queen. "I can't write a word now; I shall send her a separate letter."

An almost imperceptible expression of displeasure passed over the king's countenance, but he subdued it.

"As you please," said he courteously, although, at heart, angry at this everlasting sentimentalism.

The courtiers and ladies all wrote, each adding a few lines of a light, jesting character.

Countess Brinkenstein, however, had slipped away.

Amid jests and laughter, the whole sheet was at last filled, and then the king said:

"The chief one is still missing. Walpurga must also write to the Countess, for the voice of the people has most influence with her. Send Walpurga here."

Baum was at once sent to bring Walpurga. On the way, he explained to her what was going on.

Walpurga was not shy, in the midst of the assembled court.

"Would you rather be alone in your room while you write?" asked the king, betraying his vexation, in spite of himself.

"I'll write wherever you want me to, but I can't do it well."

Walpurga seated herself and wrote:

"If your noble father will allow it, I shall be heartily glad when my dear Countess Irma is here again. My heart longs for her.

"WALPURGA ANDERMATTEN."

The king, having read it, said: "Write also—'it will do me and the prince much good to have you here again. You make us both happier'."

"Dear king," said Walpurga, "how clever you are. What you say is quite true. Now be so kind as to dictate it to me. I can't put it into such good words, but I can write quite well from dictation. I learned it from Mademoiselle Kramer. I used to know how at school, but forgot it afterwards."

"No," replied the king, "write as your feelings prompt you. Ladies and gentlemen, let us leave Walpurga alone, and go to the verandah."

Walpurga was sitting alone, in the great breakfast-room, biting the end of her pen and vainly endeavoring to remember the king's words. Suddenly, she heard a slight noise near her and, looking up, saw Baum who was standing in the doorway.

"Come here," she exclaimed, "you can help me, for you must have heard it all."

"Certainly," replied Baum, and dictated the king's words to Walpurga. She went out and handed the letter to the king.

He praised her for having put the words so nicely. She was about to say that Baum had helped her, but one need not tell everything, and why not receive praise for what might have been?

When Walpurga returned to her room, she smiled at her own shrewdness. The king would now surely give her the farm, for he had seen that she could write down everything and could keep accounts.

The queen came into the garden with her hastily written note. It was unsealed. She gave it to the king, saying:

"Will you read it?"

"It is n't necessary," said the king, closing the letter.

After the letter was written, there was endless tittering among the court ladies. They chirruped and chattered and teased each other, and hopped about like a flock of sparrows that have just discovered an open sack of corn. They soon scattered, and ladies who, at other times, could not endure each other were now good friends and, arm in arm, would walk up and down the park, while others would stand gathered in little groups. All seemed loth to separate. They had so much to tell each other that none seemed willing to leave. They all spoke kindly of Irma. Every one was still her best friend, but, nevertheless, careful to leave a loop-hole of escape open, for things might change.

Within a few days, a great change had come over the feelings of all at the summer palace. The king and queen had, at first, greeted each other as if newly married, as if unspeakably happy; but, soon afterward, came the first distinct sense of uncongeniality which, in a word, betokened that the king wearied of the queen. He did full justice to her noble and exalted appearance. Her every word and thought was an outgush of purest emotion. But this exaltation of feeling, which, to an every-day world, appears strange and incomprehensible and yet exacts constant consideration for its peculiarities; this endeavor to give intense and exhaustive thought to every casual subject; this utter absence of all cheerful or sportive traits; this cathedral-like solemnity of character; this constant dwelling on the heights: though beautiful and engaging at times, had become monotonous and distasteful to the king. The queen's conversation lacked that sparkling effervescence which, though it be only for a moment, charms and animates the listener.

The king who was fond of change, delighted in what was sportive, capricious, or enigmatical in character, and in the conquering of difficulties.

The remembrance of Irma supplied all that he missed in the queen. He felt sure of his faithful love for his wife, but admired the frank and lovely disposition of Irma, and why should he not, therefore, enjoy her society?

"She will come and remain with us, and bring new and fresh life with her," thought he to himself when he saw the courier who bore the letter to Irma, hurrying along the road.

In the afternoon, the king and queen drove out together; he sat at her side and held the reins. Their only attendants were the two grooms who followed on horseback.

The king was quite amiable; the queen happy. He felt inwardly conscious of having, in ever so slight a degree, swerved from the right path, and this made him doubly affectionate. With a frank gaze, he looked into the brightly beaming eyes of his beautiful wife.

Thus should it ever be. Thus, purely and frankly, shouldst thou ever be able to look into those eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

"YOUR MAJESTY," said Countess Brinkenstein, on the following morning when they were sauntering in the park, "I owe you an explanation for not having signed the letter to the queen's maid of honor."

"You did not?" replied the king.

The rigid yet refined features of the old lady showed no change at these words, although she might have felt wounded at the intimation that the absence of her signature had not been remarked. But, in all things, she obeyed the highest law of the courtier; that is, to repress all personal feeling and thus avoid all sensitiveness. Couching her censure in terms of praise, in accordance with courtly fashion, she calmly added:

"The idea of the invitation was quite original, but genius must ever stand alone. Your Majesty has often honored me by addressing me as your motherly friend and, as such, you will, I trust, permit me to remark that it does not become either the gentlemen or the ladies to put their names to an extraordinary jest of Your Majesty's. There should not be the slightest cause for suspicion that this invitation was designedly open and informal, because secretly intended and wished for."

The king looked at the old lady in surprise, but acted as if unconscious of her having seen through his disguise.

"I must again tell you, my lady, that you ought to have gone to the baths. You take such sombre and serious views of everything; but when one has been at the baths, as I have, everything looks gay and happy."

"Your Majesty, it is simply my duty to emphasize the rules that govern Your Majesty's high position."

"Are you not overdoing it?"

"Your Majesty, etiquette, although invisible, is none the less valuable. Treasures of artistic and great historical value are not

melted over to make new coins, but are carefully handed down from century to century. The palace is the highest point in the land, where one is in full view of all, and where we should so live that we can afford to have all our actions seen."

The king was listless, for his mind wandered to Irma, who must now be receiving the letter. "She has awakened," thought he, "and is standing alone, or sitting beside her misanthropic father, on the balcony of the mountain castle. The letter comes, and she feels as if surrounded by a flock of chirruping, singing birds, that alight on her hands, her shoulders and her head. What a pity that one cannot behold her charming smile!"

The king's vision had been a true one. Irma was sitting beside her father and dreamily gazing into the distance. What was to become of her? If her father would only say: "You must stay here." But this being obliged to decide for herself was the trouble. If she had a husband to command her—but Baron Schoning would have been her subject, and that would have made life's load a double one. At that moment, the housekeeper announced a messenger who had just arrived on horseback.

The courier entered, delivered his letter and said that he would await an answer. Irma read it and laughed aloud. She laid the letter on her lap, took it up again, and read and laughed again. Her father looked at her in surprise.

"What's the matter?"

"Read this."

The father read it; his expression did not change in the least.

"What do you mean to do?" he asked.

"I think I must obey such requests; but can I return without incurring your reproof?"

"Always; if there be nothing in your own heart to reprove you."

Irma rang for the housekeeper and told her to order the maid to make the necessary preparations for her departure; she also ordered them to treat the courier with hospitality, and to inform him that a part of the journey was to be accomplished the same evening. "Are you angry at me, father?"

"I am never angry. I am only sorry that so few persons allow their reason to guide them. But be calm, my child. If your resolve is dictated by reason you must follow it and bear the consequences calmly, just as I do. But let us spend the few hours yet left us, in peace and quiet; life lies in the present."

Irma gave many instructions to her maid and the courier, although it always seemed to her as if she were forgetting something which would not occur to her until after she had left.

Father and daughter were still at dinner. The carriage, laden with the luggage, had been sent forward a short distance to await them in the valley. The father accompanied Irma down the

mountain. He spoke with her in a cheerful strain. While passing the apple tree, on the way, he said :

"My child, let us take leave of each other here. This is the tree that I planted on the day you were born. It often marks the limit of my evening walk."

They stood there in silence. An apple fell from the tree and struck the ground at their feet. The father picked it up and gave it to his daughter.

"Take this fruit of your native soil with you. The apple falls from the tree because it is ripe, and because the tree has nothing more to give it. In the same way, man leaves home and kindred ; but a human being is more than the fruit of the tree. And now, my child, take off your hat, and let me once more place my hands upon your head. No one knows when his hour will come. Nay, my child, do not weep. Nay, weep ; and may you, through life, only have to weep for others, but never for yourself." His voice faltered, but, recovering himself, he continued :

"And just as I now rest my hands upon your head and would fain place them on all your thoughts, do you ever remain true unto yourself. I would like to give you all my thoughts, but, for the present, keep this one in your memory : Indulge in no pleasures but those which you can remember with pleasure. Take this kiss—you kiss passionately—may you never give a kiss in which your soul is less pure than at this moment. Farewell !"

The father turned away and walked up the mountain road. He did not look back again.

Irma looked after him, trembling and feeling as if something drew her towards home and bade her remain there forever. But she felt ashamed of her indecision ; she thought of the next hour and of how strange it would seem to the servants and to her father, to see her trunks unpacked and all the preparation for the journey undone. No, it was too late, and she went on. She seated herself in the carriage and was soon on her journey. She was no longer her own mistress ; a strange power had taken possession of her.

It was on the following day, at noon, that Irma reached the summer palace. All was quiet ; no one came to meet her but the old steward, who hurriedly laid aside his long pipe.

"Where are their highnesses ?" asked the courier.

"They dine at the Devil's Pulpit to-day."

From the garden, there resounded a cry.

"O, my Countess ! My Countess is here !" exclaimed Walpurga, kissing Irma's hands and weeping for joy. "Now we'll have sunshine ! Now we'll have day !"

Irma quieted the excited woman, who said :

"I'll go and tell the queen at once. She's the only one at home, and is up on yonder hill, painting ; she does n't care to go on these holiday excursions, and here every day seems a holiday."

Irma instructed Walpurga not to tell the queen, and said that she would join her. She went to her room and sat there for a long while, buried in thought. She felt as if she had extended a friendly hand and that no one had clasped it in return.

In the hallway, they were moving trunks about. Suddenly, she thought of the time when she sat in her room, an orphan child, clad in black, and heard them moving her mother's coffin about in the adjoining apartment.

Why had it occurred to her at that moment? She arose—she could no longer endure being alone. She hastily changed her dress and went to the queen.

The queen saw her coming and advanced to meet her. Irma bent low and made an effort to kiss her hand.

The queen held her up and, embracing her, imprinted a tender kiss upon her lips.

"You're the only one who dare touch the lips that my father has kissed," said Irma—that is, she did not say it aloud, but simply moved her lips as if forming the words. Deep within her soul, arose a thought: I'd rather die a thousand deaths, than sadden that guileless heart.

The thought illumined her countenance with a noble expression, and the queen, all delight, exclaimed:

"Oh how beautiful, how radiant you are, Countess Irma!"

Irma dropped her eyes and knelt down beside the child's cradle. Her eyes were so lustrous that the child put out its hand as if to seize them.

"He's right," said Walpurga, "he tries to catch the light already, but I think your eyes have grown larger than they used to be."

Irma went with Walpurga and excused herself for not having visited the cottage by the lake. She then told her of her friend in the convent.

"And how's your father?" asked Walpurga.

Irma was startled. The queen had not even enquired about her father. Walpurga was the only one who had asked about him.

She told her that he knew her mother, and also her uncle, who often burnt pitch in the forest.

"Yes, he's my mother's brother; so you know him, too?"

"I do n't, but my father does."

Walpurga told her about her uncle Peter, who was known as the "little pitchman," and vowed that she would send him something, one of these days, for the poor old fellow had a hard time of it in this world. Old Zenza had had the courage to come to the palace, but the little pitchman would starve to death before he would do such a thing.

While Walpurga was speaking, the queen went to the cradle, and when the prince saw her, he struggled, with hands and feet, as

if trying to get to her. She bent down and raised him up, and Walpurga exclaimed :

"Dear me ! on the very day our Countess returns, our prince sits up for the first time. Yes, she can make everything go right."

The queen and Irma remained together in cheerful and unconstrained conversation. In the evening, there were joyful greetings on the part of those who had returned from the excursion to the Devil's Pulpit. Irma now, for the first time, learned that her brother was not at court. While at the baths, he had made the acquaintance of Baroness Steigeneck and her daughter and was now visiting them.

The king's greeting of Irma was quite formal. Even Countess Brinkenstein could have found nothing to object to in it ; but how could he well have done otherwise, when the queen said :

"I can't tell you how happy our dear Countess's return has made me ; we've already spent several delightful hours together."

In the evening, there were fireworks which the king had ordered to be prepared in honor of Irma's arrival. Far and near, the people were looking at the lights and the gay-colored sheets of fire ascending heavenward. At last, Countess Irma's name stood forth in letters of fire, held aloft by mountaineers. The flame crackled, and, from behind the shrubbery, there issued strains of music which were echoed back from the distance. In the midst of all this noise and splendor, Irma was ever asking herself : "How fares it now with your father?"

Count Eberhard, in his mountain castle, was sitting by the window and, looking out into the starry night, said to himself : "Just as the stars above are separate and distinct from each other, so is every human soul solitary and alone. Each travels in its own orbit, its course determined by the attraction and repulsion of the heavenly bodies that environ it."

That night, Irma dreamt that a star descended from heaven and fell upon her bosom. She tried to grasp it, but it eluded her and transformed itself into a human figure which, with averted glance, exclaimed : "Thou, too, art solitary."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

HANSEI was looking out of the window, holding his pipe with both hands and smoking away, while the morning passed. Near by, a day-laborer was cutting a load of wood. Hansei looked on, calmly nodding approval when the woodcutter made a clever stroke and, like a true judge, smiling at the awkward fellow when an obstinate branch would oblige him to turn it again and again before he succeeded in chopping it up. The grandmother was carrying the chopped wood into the shed at the gable end of the house and was there piling it up. Every time she passed, she would look at Hansei, who did not stir. At last, with an armful of wood, she stopped before him and said :

"Well?"

"Of course," he replied and puffed on. The grandmother's exclamation had meant: "What's this? Are you only here to look on? Can't you, at least, pile up the cut wood?"

Hansei had fully understood her and had answered as if to say: "Of course I shan't help; I do n't feel a mind to."

The grandmother was about to throw down the armful of wood before his very face, but she reflected that the day-laborer outside need not see that. She carried the wood into the shed and then went into the room and said:

"Look here, Hansei! I've got something to tell you."

"I can hear you," he replied, still looking out of the window.

"I do n't know what to make of you. What's got into you?"

Hansei did not deem it necessary to make any reply, but went on smoking while the grandmother continued:

"It's shame enough that you have the wood brought to the house, instead of going and getting it yourself. You're a woodcutter, and yet you must have another come and cut your wood for you. Such a thing never happened before. As long as this house stands, the axe-handle has never grown warm in the hands of a stranger. Are n't you ashamed of yourself?"

"There's no need of my doing it," replied Hansei.

"Very well, I suppose you know your needs, better than I do," cried the old woman, angrily; "but I'll not scold. Do just as you please; let yourself and everything else go to ruin. As you make

your bed, so you'll have to lie on it. Q, if Walpurga knew of this! She's gone away among strangers, for our sake, while you—"

"There! I've had enough of it," said Hansei, closing the window and turning round. "Mother-in-law, I do n't interfere in anything; I let you manage just as you please, and so I do n't mean to let anybody interfere with me."

"I do n't want to interfere with you. You're father and husband."

"A fine husband, indeed, whose wife leaves him for a year."

"Perhaps she's having a harder time of it than you."

"May be so; but she has pleasure and enjoyment, and what have I? I wander about as if lost, and that's why I'm not ashamed. The best thing left me is the tavern. One can feel at home there, when he can't in his own house. I do n't need to cut or haul wood any longer, and I want to have some good of my wife's being—"

Hansei could not finish what he was about to say, for, at that moment, the door opened and Zenza entered.

"What are you doing here? Who sent for you?" enquired the grandmother of Zenza, who replied:

"Good morning to you—I did n't come to see you; I want to see this man. Who's master here? you or he?"

"Speak out; what's the matter?" said Hansei, winking at his mother-in-law.

"I was to bring you the smith's compliments and tell you that the gun's ready for you, at his workshop."

"And so you're going to be a sportsman?" enquired the grandmother; "are you going a hunting?"

"I suppose I'll have to go if you do n't carry me," replied Hansei, laughing loudly at his joke.

The grandmother left the room, slamming the door after her. As nimbly as a cat, Zenza sprang towards Hansei and said:

"She'll wait for you up there, at dusk." Then, in a loud voice, she added: "God keep you, Hansei," and left the house.

The grandmother went out to the woodcutter and told him that he must n't think they were used to having such wicked people as Zenza come to the house; but that, no matter how often they forbade her coming, she would force herself upon them, in order to show her gratitude for Walpurga's having procured the pardon of her son Thomas. It had been a foolish action; for Red Thomas would have been much better taken care of under lock and key. But Walpurga had meant it for the best.

The woodcutter was satisfied; he well knew that it was a respectable house, and it was quite by accident that he remarked:

"I wonder why Zenza's without Black Esther. They're generally together in the daytime."

The grandmother's eyes flashed when she heard his words. She bent down hurriedly, took up an armful of wood and carried it up to the house. When she reached the gable side, she found Hansei there, piling up the wood and whistling cheerfully. The grandmother kept on carrying wood, while Hansei piled it up, neither of them speaking a word. At noon, Hansei paid the woodcutter and said:

"I'll cut the rest myself; you needn't come to-morrow."

"He's a good fellow, after all," thought the grandmother to herself. "He don't like to give in, in so many words, but afterwards he does what you tell him, for all. He soon finds out what's right."

After dinner she brought the child to him and said:

"Just look here! Just feel! There's a tooth coming already. It's very soon, but it was just the same way with your wife. Just see how it puts its little hands in its mouth. God be praised that our child is thriving so nicely! Since you've been using hay for fodder, and since it's been getting the new cow's milk, you can see the child growing before your very eyes. If Walpurga could only see it, just for an hour. Take it; I'll give it to you carefully. See, it's laughing at you. It knows you. Ah, dear me! but it does n't know its mother yet."

"I can't take the child on my arms; I'm afraid I'd hurt it," replied Hansei.

The grandmother felt like saying: "If you let yourself go to ruin, you'll surely harm the child—" but checked herself. When a man is getting back into the right road, it is n't well to keep preaching at him. Let him go on quietly in his own way, or else he will lose all pleasure in it.—Thus thought the grandmother to herself, and, although she had already opened her lips to speak, she swallowed her words.

Hansei looked about him, with an unsteady glance, and said:

"Mother-in-law, you were going to say something else."

"There's no need of saying everything. But yes!—you lower yourself when you let Zenza bring messages to you. I noticed the woodcutter making a queer face when he saw that Zenza was allowed to enter our house. Do n't go to the Windenreuthe; the place has a bad name and it does no one credit to go there. If you do want to go hunting, and have bought yourself a gun, you can give a boy a penny to go there and get it for you."

"Yes, indeed," thought Hansei, smiling, "grandmother's right; but one need n't tell all one's thoughts."

"I'm going into the forest now. I want to be about when they load up my wood."

He took his hat and mountain-staff, donned his hunter's pouch and provided himself with a piece of bread. The grandmother, carrying the child on her arm, accompanied him as far as the

cherry tree, from which the withered leaves were already beginning to fall.

Hansei went into the forest; but, as soon as he was out of sight, he turned about and took the road that led to Windenreuthe.

He felt quite strangely while on his way. He had never before known that he breathed so hard and was so easily frightened. He was terrified by every sound, by the nutpecker flying from the tree, the chattering magpie, the hooting hawk-owl on the rocky ridge, and the bellowing cow in the meadow.

"I ought n't to go, and I won't go," he exclaimed, bringing his staff down with such force that the pointed ferrule struck sparks from the stones in the road, and yet he went on. Fortunately, a mist was ascending the mountain, but he walked on, farther and farther, through the clouds.

Windenreuthe consists of a few poor-looking, scattered houses. Hansei stopped in front of the first house, as if riveted to the spot. He was seized with fright as sudden as if a bullet had struck him, and yet what had alarmed him was nothing, after all. He had merely heard a child crying in the house before which he stood. "Your child cries just like this one," said an inner voice. "How will you be, when you see it and hear it and kiss it again? How will you be, when you pass this house on your way back. . . . How will you be, in the spring, when your wife returns and you walk with her and meet Black Esther? And at every merry-making, either at home or at the inn, Black Esther will come and say: 'Make room for me; I belong here too'."

Hansei's brain reeled. He looked into the future—days and years passed before him in an instant. And yet he went on. Indeed, he snapped his fingers and said to himself: "You're a foolish fellow; a perfect simpleton; you have n't a bit of courage. Other people are merry and lead a happy life, and do n't care a deuce about it and—what jolly stories the innkeeper tells of such and such a one, and what pranks the hunters tell of. . . . To enjoy all you can and lead a loose life into the bargain, does one credit with those who're not obliged to earn a living."

He removed his hat; his head seemed as if burning. He put his hat on again, pressing it down over his eyes, and went on through the dreary village.

Night had come on. Zenza lived in a so-called herb-hut, in the woods and at some distance from the village. It was there that her deceased husband had distilled brandy from various herbs, but principally of gentian. His master-wort was still noted.

The light from a large fire shone through the open door of the hut. At that moment, some one came to the threshold and leaned against the doorpost. She was full of wild beauty and power. Behind her, the flames were brightly burning. Hansei was now quite free from the fear he had experienced on the night when he

still believed in the fabled forest-sprites. The figure now placed its hands to its cheek and uttered a shrill shout, which might be compared to a tone-rocket ascending on high and then bursting into all sorts of carols. Hansei trembled, and then he heard Zenza say:

"You need n't shout so. Do n't scream to the whole world that you're at home. Wait till the horse is in the stable—".

"Hallo!" thought Hansei to himself, while he stood there, trembling, "she means to make a prisoner of you, and will drag every kreutzer from your pocket, if you act meanly or badly with her . . . She'll make a beggar of you, and disgrace you in the bargain. No, you shan't rob me of my money. I won't put myself in your clutches. I'll do no such thing. You shan't have a right to stand up before my wife, and look her in the face and talk to her, while I'll have to thank you, in the bargain, if you do n't do it. No, a thousand times no. I won't be wicked. I'd rather—"

As if pursued by an enemy, Hansei hurried back with mighty strides, and the unbarked oaken staff which he held with both hands served to support him in his flight. It was long since he had bounded down the rocks with such energy and rapidity. He again passed the house where he had heard the child crying. It had not yet been hushed, but he who heard it was a different man from what he had been a little while ago. He hurried on as if pursued. The perspiration trickled down his cheeks and dropped on his hands, but he did not once stop. He felt as if Zenza, Black Esther and Red Thomas had followed and overtaken him, and were tearing the clothes from his body. It was not until he had gone far into the forest, that he ventured to sit down on the stump of a tree. He felt as tired as if he had been running ten miles. He rested his hands on his naked knees, and it seemed as if they were grasping a strange body. He touched the stockings that Walpurga had knit for him, and the first word that left his lips was: "Walpurga, I've only once trodden such a path. It shall never happen again. I swear it, Walpurga," and, taking the last letter he had received from her out of his pocket, he said: "I put your letter in my shoe, and these feet shall never tread the path of evil again. Thank God! I've only been wicked in thought." He took off his shoe, placed the letter in it, and had just stood up again, when he once more heard the loud shout issuing from Zenza's house.

"Scream on, as long as you've a mind to," said he to himself, while he went farther into the wood. He tried to light his pipe, but always struck his fingers with the steel; and, besides, his tinder was damp. "You do n't need any fire, you wicked fellow," said he at last, while he put the pipe into his pocket. "You do n't need fire; there's one burning up there, that would have been

hellfire for you. You may be right glad that you 're out of it ; it 's more than you deserve."

If Hansei, at that moment, could have laid hands on the Hansei of an hour ago he would have strangled him.

The mist had become so thick that it was almost like a drizzling rain. The forest seemed to be growing vaster, and a path was nowhere to be found.

"You 've lost your way, and it serves you right," said Hansei, speaking to himself. "You're no longer fit to be with decent men, you good-for-nothing wretch. It's only a pity that your wife and child are innocent sufferers by it—"

Two men in one were lost in the mist. Hansei cursed and swore at himself, but soon grew frightened, for his mind became filled with stories of the evil spirits that lead the solitary traveler up and down hill, and round and about, through the livelong night. He was about to turn back. It would be easier to find the way to Windenreuthe.

"Wait, you accursed devil," said he, addressing the invisible companion who had thus advised him ; "all you want is to get me back there again. No, you shan't catch me."

He again tried to strike a light and, this time, with success. Just as he drew the first puff, he heard the tones of the bell, and pressed his hand to his forehead, for it seemed to him as if the clapper of the bell were striking against his head.

"That 's the vesper bell of the chapel by the lake. The sounds seem so near. Can I be on this side? No, it 's the mist that makes it sound so."

Uncovering his head, and clinging with both hands to the staff which now stood firmly planted in the ground, he cast aside all other thoughts and breathed a silent prayer.

While praying, he could not help thinking : Oh God ! I can still pray, although I could so far forget myself and go astray.

The immortal words which an inspired mind drew from the depths of the human heart and its never-ending struggles, thousands of years ago, have been, and still are, the source of blessings innumerable. They are a guide to the lonely wanderer who has lost his way in the mist and darkness of the forest, and lead him back to the right path. The bell utters its sounds and, though it does not speak in words, it yet fills the soul with those immortal words which serve as a staff to the weary and a guide to the blind. When Hansei finished his prayer, the bell was still tolling, and it seemed to him as if the whole village, every soul in it,—and above all, his wife and child—were calling to him. And now he found the path. He descended the stony bed of a dried mountain current which led into the valley. He had gone far out of his way, for when he descended the mountain, he found himself back of the Chamois inn. Evil desires, fright, devotion, and losing his way had made him both hungry and thirsty.

"Ah! God greet you, Hansei," exclaimed the host.

"God greet you! God be with you!" stammered out Hansei, confusedly.

"What's the matter with you? You're as pale as death. What's happened to you? Where do you come from?" enquired the host.

"I'll tell you all about it, after a while," answered Hansei; "but, first of all, give me a schoppen of wine."

The wine was brought, and Hansei looked around, as if wondering where he was.

He felt as if he had come from another world, and it was not until he had eaten some bread and salt, that he told them of the strange adventures he had had that day. He had gone out into the forest to load up the wood, and had lost his way, and wandered in the direction of Windenreuthe. He said this intentionally, lest some one might have seen him in that neighborhood.

They spoke of the belief in ghosts, but the innkeeper ridiculed such nursery tales. Hansei made no reply. The innkeeper remarked, very sensibly:

"You're often bewildered, nowadays, just because your Walpurga is n't with you. You're thinking of her all the time, and that's what makes you lose your way."

"Yes—quite likely."

"Do you know what they call you in the village, now?"

"Well, what?"

"The he-nurse. Your wife, who's with the crown prince, is the she-nurse, and so they call you the he-nurse."

Hansei laughed with all his might.

"Say, Hansei, what pay does your wife get?" enquired Wastl the weaver.

"I won't tell," replied Hansei, with an air of mystery.

"It's a long while since you had a letter from your wife, is n't it?" enquired the innkeeper.

"No; I'm expecting one any hour." He had scarcely uttered the words, when the letter carrier entered and said, "So here you are, Hansei; I've been at your house twice to-day. I've got a letter with money in it, for you."

"Let's have it," said Hansei, breaking the five seals with a trembling hand.

"A nice way of treating money," said the innkeeper, picking up a hundred florin note from the floor. "That'll suit me very well. I've use for one, and will give you the change for it."

"All right," said Hansei, leaving the money in the innkeeper's hands. He then read his letter:

"*Dear Hansei:* This time, I write to you all alone. Here are a hundred florins that the queen has given me for a special present, because you have n't come to see me; but I must tell you all

about it so that you can understand it. You've no idea what a good soul the queen is; whenever you pray, pray for her. We often sit together for hours, and she can take down everything on paper beautifully—the trees and all sorts of things, and we talk to each other as if we had gone to school together. But she's Lutheran and is very good and pious, and has such kind thoughts about all things that an ugly word could n't pass her lips. If she weren't Lutheran, she might become a saint, but she'll get to heaven anyhow. That's my belief, and you can believe it, too; but you need n't tell any one.

"Well, the queen wanted to give me a treat. She would like to make the whole world happy; that's the way the saints must have been in the olden times. Well, as I said before, the queen wanted to give me a treat, because her husband came home well and hearty, and they're so fond of each other, and she wanted you and the child and mother to come and see me for one or two days, for she notices everything; she looks right into your heart, and I'm often homesick for you all. And when the queen talked about having you come, I said to her: 'That would be very nice, but it would cost a pretty penny,' and so I let her make me a present of the money, and we can make better use of it. You have n't the right sort of clothes, you know, and the people here might make fun of you. But with all that, I would n't have got the money, for that's nothing to her. She never thinks of such things. She's never counted money in all her life, and I really believe that she do n't know how to reckon. The court paymaster attends to all that. Here there's an extra servant for everything—butlers and silver keepers and lots of others. But now my good Countess is back again. She's been to see her father. They say he's a sort of a hermit who do n't want to know anything of the world, and I must thank my Countess that I got the money, for she knows how to manage everything. And so I send you the money. Put it out safely, and do n't forget to take some of it to make a holiday for you and the child and grandmother.

"Ah, dear Hansei, the palace folk are not all saints and honest people, as I once used to think. Lots of thieving and deceit are carried on here. The father of my Mademoiselle Kramer is an honorable old man; he's the keeper of the castle here, and he's told me many things. But one can be honest everywhere, in the palace or in the cottage by the lake. And now, I beg of you dear Hansei—I always say 'dear Hansei,' whenever I think of you, and that's very often. It was only last night that I dreamt of you, but I won't tell you about that, because we ought n't to believe in dreams. But write to me very soon and tell me how it goes with you; send me a good, long letter, and do n't let the time seem

long till we meet again ; and always think as kindly of me as I do of you.

"Till death, your faithful

"WALPURGA."

In spite of their entreaties, Hansei would not tell a word of what was in the letter ; he went home quietly, and kissed his sleeping child. He felt happy that he could thus be at home again, and that his home did not reject him. A cold sweat came over him when he thought that he was sleeping in this bed, and of what a changed man he might have become. He stretched forth his hand towards his wife's bed and, in the silent night, kissed her pillow.

"Now I'm all right again," said he. He arose, struck a light, and removed the letter which he had put into his shoe. Then, cutting the passage, "until death, your faithful Walpurga," out of the letter last received, he loosened the inner sole, placed the little paper underneath it, and fastened the sole down again. After that, he soon fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER II.

"YOUR MAJESTY," said Countess Irma to the King one day, while walking on the verandah with him—the queen was in the music-room, practicing a classical composition with one of the court performers—"it is curious that, while absence lends additional charms and greater merit to some persons, there are others who are all the more perfect and interesting when one is in constant, daily intercourse with them. And yet, when away from such, it is almost impossible to remember them just as they are ; and as to describing their character, or even their personal appearance, to one who is not acquainted with them—why, that is entirely out of the question. How do you account for it?"

"I must confess that I have never reflected on the subject," replied the king, "but it seems to me that the chief characteristic of the one class is an infinitude of small details ; while with the other, one is struck by the general effect of the various traits that go to make up the character. Those whose character still presents an unsolved problem, and who thus give us more to think of, would seem to belong to the class to whom absence lends importance. Does it not seem so to you?"

"Certainly ; but I might also say that the one class are more impressive and thus, even in the present, seem like remote historical personages. Although they die, they yet remain—indeed, absence is a sort of death. The others, however, only exist as long as they breathe, and only live for us as long as we breathe the same atmosphere with them."

"Can you name examples of such imposing historical personages, and also of ephemeral ones?"

"At present, I could only recall the historical."

A slight blush passed over the king's face as he, when he found that Irma hesitated, "I beg of you."

"In that class, I place my father over all others. I cannot describe to Your Majesty how his great nature seems constantly before me."

"Yes, I've often heard him spoken of as a man of high character and eminent ability. It is a pity, for his sake—and, still more, for our own—that he is opposed to the government. And in which class would you count me? I have sufficient confidence in your candor to believe that you will frankly give me your opinion, and you are so sure of my—my—respect, that you can speak without reserve."

"Your Majesty is present company," replied Irma, "and yet, at the same time, absent; for your position exalts you far above the rest of us."

"Friendship does not dwell on the throne, but here where we stand on equal ground, dear Countess."

"Nor does friendship pass sentence," replied the Countess. "Her place is not the judgment seat. I know of nothing more revolting than when men who profess to be friends, constantly cast up their accounts with each other, as if to say: 'You are worth so much and I am worth so much; this is yours and this is mine—'"

"Ah, these state affairs," interposed the king, as a lackey announced the arrival of the minister. "We will speak of this subject again," he added, taking leave of Irma and politely greeting the ladies and gentlemen whom he passed on his way. He offered his hand to his prime minister and, accompanied by him, went into the palace.

Irma's friendly relations with the king seemed to have acquired new life since her return. Her daily greetings seemed filled with the joy of meeting after long separation.

When the king would say: "Good morning, Countess," and Irma would answer: "Thanks, Your Majesty," there lay a wealth of unuttered thought in those simple words. The king had never before been in so pleasing and witty a mood, and Irma, it was justly said, had brought the mountain breezes with her. The queen would never tire of telling the ladies and gentlemen of the court how pleased she was with Irma who, although simple and unaffected, possessed the highest intellectual gifts.

Like melodies that have sunk deep into the soul and which gradually return and harmoniously blend, so did her father's words and ideas now recur to Irma. She had spent weeks in a strict school, where idle talk and trifling were of no value and where distinctness and certainty were insisted upon. Formerly, Irma had been regarded as a child of nature, freely pouring forth whatever engaged her thoughts; but now they recognized in her a mind whose

groundwork was solid and comprehensive, and which, nevertheless, was full of the simplicity of nature. She was full of sympathy and kindness, but did not concern herself about prevailing modes of thought. She freely expressed her likes and dislikes, and one was obliged to admit that she was something more than a mere original or artless hoyden, and that she really possessed intellectual self-consciousness to a great degree.

Irma often changed her style of dressing her hair. This was naturally censured as coquetry, and as an attempt to draw the glances of all upon her. But it was simply a desire to appear different every day, even though it were in unimportant and subordinate matters.

It was very fortunate for Irma that she had become so attached to Walpurga; for, on sunny afternoons, the queen would scarcely ever suffer Walpurga to leave her; and then Irma would be seated with them and would read aloud to the queen, or join Walpurga in some of the lovely mountain songs.

The king's eyes would sparkle with delight when he happened to join them at such times, and find Irma with his wife.

"You look troubled," said the queen, when the king, who had just left the ministerial council, joined her and Irma in the park.

"And so I am."

"May I ask why?"

Irma was about to withdraw, but the king said:

"Stay, Countess; the matter is one which has been brought to an issue by the case of your friend Emma." Turning to the queen, he added: "Has our Countess told you of the terrible fate of her friend?"

"She has; and when I think of it, I feel as if I were standing on the edge of a precipice."

Strangely enough, the king had, thus far, neither spoken to Irma about the matter, nor alluded to her letter. Irma had had so much to engage her mind since her return, that Emma's troubles had almost escaped her memory.

"Our friend," began the king, "has informed me of the affair, and I appreciate her delicacy in refraining from pressing the subject. In matters of state, we have no right to allow personal feelings to affect us. Nevertheless, one of our greatest pleasures is to find that our friends cherish our honor as their own."

Irma looked down. He added:

"Although a prince owes thanks to his friends, for informing him of what is going on, no influence, not even the best, should affect his decision."

Irma did not dare to raise her eyes.

"The matter stands thus," continued the king. "We have provisionally suspended the right to receive new nuns, and now the ministers desire me, at the next meeting of the estates, to con-

sent to the introduction of a law by which the convent of Frauenwörth is to be definitively placed upon the extinct list. They hope by this and additional measures, to be enabled to make a stand against the constantly increasing strength of the opposition."

The king looked at Irma while he said this, and she enquired :

"And has Your Majesty approved the draft of the law?"

"Not yet. I have no special feeling in favor of keeping up the convents, but I do n't find it so easy a matter to lay the axe to a tree which is the growth of centuries. It is the special duty of royalty to establish and foster institutions that are to endure longer than a generation or even a century, and a convent—What do you think of it, Mathilde?"

"I think that a woman who has lost all, should not be prevented from devoting herself to solitude and prayer. But perhaps I ought not express an opinion on the subject. My youthful impressions, or rather instruction, in regard to convent life, may not always have been correct. It seems to me that woman alone should have the right to determine as to the continuance of a convent. What do you think of it, Countess Irma? You were educated at a convent, and Emma is your friend."

"Yes," said Irma, "I was with my friend at Frauenwörth, where she desires to live, or rather to die; for life there is a daily waiting for death. It seems terrible to me, too, to think of making what may perhaps be only a passing mood, the irrevocable law of one's life, or a fate from which there can be no escape. And yet many other holy institutions are just the same. I can now see what an exalted and difficult vocation it is to be a king. I frankly confess that if I were now called upon to decide this matter, or to suggest a law upon the subject, I could not arrive at a decision. Now, more than ever before, do I realize that we women were not born to rule."

Irma's voice, although usually so clear and firm, was now veiled and trembling. She was standing on a pinnacle where she could find no firm footing; she looked up to the king, as if to a higher being; his bearing was so firm, his eye so clear. She would gladly have fallen on her knees at his feet.

"Come nearer, Count Wildenort," exclaimed the king.

Irma started. Was her father there? She was so excited that everything seemed possible.

She had, at the moment, quite forgotten that her brother Bruno was the king's aid-de-camp. He had been standing a little distance off, and now approached, in order to take his leave of the queen, as he was about to go away for some time.

The king and queen left; after which, Irma and her brother walked away.

The king's behavior seemed a riddle; but for this he had his own reasons, the first and greatest of which was invincible distrust of

others. "Distrust all," was the great precept which had been instilled into him from earliest youth. "One can never know what selfish purposes may lurk behind the noblest exterior." This maxim was in accord with one trait of the king's character. He desired to be strong in himself, to allow no one to guide his judgment; and that is the great secret of the heroic nature. It was this which, with all his love of freedom, had made constitutionalism repugnant to him; for the constitution destroyed great and powerful personal influence, and required that he be simply the vehicle of the spirit of the age, or the exponent of public opinion. This was opposed to his own strong self-consciousness. He distrusted every one who attempted to press him for an opinion or a decision. He even distrusted Irma. Perhaps she did not know that she was the instrument of a party; but she was, nevertheless. They had found out that he held her in great esteem, and were now availing themselves of Emma's entering the convent, to force him to a decision. He would not submit to this. Irma should be made to know that he would not allow another, even though it were his lovely friend, to lead him. The olden time could never again return. They would find him a new being; he would not permit female interference in state affairs.

It was these conflicting feelings of distrust and self-exaltation that had induced the king to refrain from mentioning Irma's letter, and at last to speak of it in the way he had.

While walking with the queen, the king still enjoyed his victory over the women and, above all, over the one whom he had believed possessed of so powerful a mind. He repeatedly spoke of Irma's petition in favor of her friend, and of his determination not to be swayed by it. His remarks betrayed a trace of ill humor towards Irma. The queen was lavish in her praise of the Countess. The king smiled.

CHAPTER III.

"DO N'T let me wait any longer for your answer," said Bruno to his sister; "are you ready?"

"I beg your pardon. What was it? I was so preoccupied that I did n't hear you."

Bruno looked at his sister with an air of surprise. Irma had indeed not heard him. She had been puzzling her brain in regard to the king's behavior. He had plainly intimated that he would allow no one to influence his course in state affairs. It now occurred to Irma that the tone of the letter which she had written while at the convent, had been quite improper, and her heart was filled with thanks to the great and noble man, who, having it in his power to forgive her, had forgiven her so gracefully. She felt doubly grateful to him for refusing to be swayed by her ardent

entreaties. She was, herself, in doubt as to the best course, and it now seemed to her, as at first, that it was the duty of the state to prevent the consummation of an irrevocable vow.

"I beg your pardon," she again said to her brother. "Do you wish anything of me?"

"You must go with me to-morrow," said Bruno; "we're going on a journey. I've already obtained leave of absence for myself, and the queen will grant you leave."

"Go on a journey? Where?"

"To witness my betrothal."

"Surely not with—?"

"Certainly; with the king's sister; or, if you'd rather have it so, his half, or quarter sister. Baroness Arabella von Steigeneck will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

Irma looked down. It was the oldest daughter of the dancer who had been ennobled by the late king. Irma spoke of the impression that this marriage would make upon her father; but Bruno jestingly answered, that he and his sister had been separated from their father, who indulged the strange whim of desiring to be a common citizen. Perceiving that his remarks displeased Irma, he changed his manner and explained to her how cruel and narrow-minded it would be to make Baroness Arabella, who had royal blood in her veins, suffer on account of a few irregularities for which she was not to blame. And when he represented to Irma, that, independent of his wishes, it was her duty to meet Arabella in a spirit of kindness and without prejudice, he touched the right chord. He added:

"You are so affectionate to the simple-minded peasant woman, the crown prince's nurse. It is very cheap to practice humanity towards one of the lower classes. You will find its exercise pleasanter and more effective in this instance."

"I am glad to find that you think so," replied Irma, regarding her brother with a more cheerful glance.

Bruno was delighted. He had used the right bait and, for a few moments, found real pleasure in conversing on such subjects as elevation of mind and nobility of soul. Irma consented to accompany him. When she applied to the queen for leave of absence, and the latter, in the most delicate manner, intimated surprise at Bruno's choice, Irma proved herself so zealous an advocate of humanity that the queen could not avoid saying to her:

"You are, and ever will be, a noble heart."

Irma imprinted a fervent kiss on the queen's hand.

They started off on their journey, taking with them Bruno's two private servants, and jockey Fritz, Baum's son. Father Baum, who was both indispensable and ubiquitous, also accompanied them.

Bruno was in high spirits. Like all other epicures, he was not

averse to occasional tender scenes. He played the piano excellently and, at times, would indulge in a sentimental adagio. Irma now seemed sentimental in his eyes. But he soon tired of the melting mood and in his flippant, jesting manner, exclaimed :

"I am better than the world of cavaliers that surround us. You smile—and wonder what sort of cavaliers they must be among whom I am the best.—Yes, dear sister Krimhilde, it is so, nevertheless. I honestly confess that I only marry this lady in order to be enabled to lead as jolly a life as possible, and am I not better than those who act the hypocrite in such a case?"

"Yes, if you think that makes you better. But I think you're simply ashamed of being in love, and are afraid of appearing sentimental."

"Thanks! You're a profound judge of human nature."

Bruno, at heart, desired his sister to imagine that he was in love; for that would render the demeanor of both of them more natural and more befitting the occasion. He blushed and smiled with a bashful air.

Baroness Steigeneck lived in a little town and occupied a castle which had once been a retreat of a sister of the late king.

They reached the castle. A bright peacock stood on the high wall, and filled the air with its shrill cry.

Rooms had been prepared for Bruno and Irma, who retired to change their dress. Bruno appeared in full uniform, and with all his medals and orders. They were conducted to Baroness Steigeneck's *salon* by two servants, who opened the folding doors. Baroness Steigeneck, who was clad in studiously simple attire, came forward to meet Bruno and Irma, and received them with a graceful bow. Bruno kissed her, and then embraced his betrothed, who, in form and feature, presented a pleasing appearance. He introduced her to his sister, who embraced and kissed her.

The furniture of the castle was splendid, but in somewhat gaudy taste, with more regard to show than comfort. A life-size picture of the late king was displayed in the great *salon*.

Irma felt alarmed when she first beheld the old Baroness. Her boudoir was hung with pictures of herself, taken while she was yet a young, beautiful and voluptuous creature, and representing her in various bold poses, such as *Psyche*, *Eros*, and the *Fairy Queen*. And could this heavy woman, with rigid features, be the same person? Her chief employment was card playing, and it was here, for the first time in her life, that Irma saw people who would sit at cards by the hour, out in the open air, under the trees, and amid the singing of birds. What would become of some people, how empty their lives would be, if there were no cards!

The time was pleasantly spent with music—for Baroness Arabella sang beautifully,—merry dinners and excursions in the neighborhood. Irma could not help watching the servants, and won-

dering how they felt, and what their thoughts must be, while serving such a mistress. But she saw the same respect shown as at court; and when they drove through the little town, the people would stop and lift their hats in token of respect, for the Baroness had brought life and money to the place. Everything in this world, even respect, can be purchased.

Three days sped by quickly. Baroness Steigeneck held a little court, quite modest in appearance. An old and exceedingly eccentric French legitimist was the special attraction of this court, and French was the only language spoken.

The formal betrothal was speedily settled by the notary, whom Bruno had brought with him from the capital. He had been carefully instructed and it fared hard with the old Baroness. There were all sorts of devilishly close clauses in reference to death or separation. Bruno had made himself secure. The Baroness jestingly spoke of love, and said that she had not imagined such enthusiasm possible at the present day. Bruno agreed with her, for they both well knew that it was simply a question of money.

Arabella had the air of a well-bred lady and possessed that degree of education that can be purchased from teachers. She could sing and sketch, and spoke three foreign languages, which, at her mother's bidding, she was obliged to make a parade of. But all of this showed application, rather than native talent. She had also read a great deal, but affected ignorance of certain works, passages in which might be applied to herself or her mother.

Irma was exceedingly kind to her sister-in-law, and Bruno heartily thanked her. And yet Irma's mind was not at ease. The house seemed under the influence of a peculiar spell—it was just as if in fairy-land. People would go about, and laugh and joke and sing and play, but there was one word they dared not utter; for, at the very mention of it, the castle, with all its pomp and splendor, would disappear. And that word was: "father." But it was here that Irma was the more impelled to think of her father. When alone in her room, she began a letter to him, and when she wrote the words: "Dear Father," she looked about her. She regarded it as her duty, and thought herself better able than Bruno, to inform her father of the betrothal, and to invoke his forbearance for this unfortunate, though wealthy, girl. Never before had she made so many unsuccessful attempts to write a letter. She had begun again and again, and had always ended by tearing up the sheet and throwing it into the fire. She found it impossible to finish her letter, and at last concluded to wait until she returned to the summer palace. But she could not get rid of a desire to speak of parents, and when Baum came to her with a message, she detained him with the question:

"Baum, are your parents still living?"

"No."

"Did you know them long?"

Baum coughed behind his raised hand and answered: "I never knew my father; and my mother—my mother was taken from me long ago."

Baum, who still held his hand before his face, bit his lips and at last ventured to ask: "May I enquire, my lady, why you put that question to me?"

"I desire to acquaint myself with the life and history of those whom I know personally."

Baum dropped his hand and his face was as smooth and void of expression as before.

The strictest decorum was observed during their stay at the castle. On one occasion, however, Irma felt offended, and that was when the old lady—they called her "Her Grace"—declared the relation of an affianced couple the silliest of all conventionalities—the most natural and proper course would be to have marriage follow immediately upon the betrothal—yes, in the very same hour.

These remarks were accompanied by a peculiar change in the expression of the old lady's features. Irma was startled and did not get over her fright, for when, at parting, the Baroness impressed a kiss upon her, Irma could not help shuddering.

Irma had been sitting in the carriage for some time, when Bruno at last came, and again stopped to throw a kiss to his betrothed, who was standing at the window.

They drove off, and when Irma found herself alone with her brother she said, in a loud voice and with a strange expression:

"O father! father!" She drew a long and deep breath, as if relieved from some dread spell.

"What ails you?" said Bruno.

Irma did not care to tell him what she felt, and merely replied:

"As soon as we get back to the palace, you must write to father, or, what would be better, must go to him. Let him scold you, if it must be. He's our father, after all, and will be kind to you once more and accept what is past."

"We had better write," said Bruno.

"No!" exclaimed Irma, clasping both his hands, "you must do it, for Arabella's sake."

"For her sake?"

"Yes. I wish her to feel that there is some one whom she can address as 'father'; that would be the happiest moment she had ever known."

Bruno drew back. After a little while, he said:

"Let us speak softly. You know, I suppose, that you've touched me in a tender spot. Arabella could n't call any one father, and can't do so now. Irma, you're strong enough to look

the truth in the face. What is it that forms the ir dissoluble bond between father and child? It is not nature alone, but history. By rejecting our rank, our father has denied father and mother and our long line of ancestors. It was he who broke the strong and glittering chain that, through him, linked us to our house. We have renewed the connection which was thus broken, but, in doing so, have become sundered from our father. He separated himself from us; in the sense in which you mean, we can neither of us say 'father'."

Irma turned pale. She had never thought of the matter in that light, and had never dreamt that Bruno would thus defend his course. She had thought his life naught but frivolity, and now, for the first time, beheld the deep chasm that separated them. She was about to reply that her father had remained true to all that was noble, to all that the best of their ancestors had transmitted to him, and that he had simply cast aside the external prerogatives of rank. But, for the first time, she felt that she could not maintain her ground against her brother. She, too, had separated herself from her father. She was silent. They drove on and, for hours, neither spoke a word.

They reached the summer palace. To all who congratulated her on her brother's betrothal, Irma offered most courteous thanks. She felt strangely embarrassed in the presence of the court jeweler, who had been requested to present himself at the palace with various caskets of gems. She was to join Bruno in selecting a rich present for Arabella. She did so, but would not suffer any of the jewels to be tried on herself. Her maid was present for that purpose and, at last, they decided on a rich set of diamonds, which was at once dispatched to Bruno's betrothed.

CHAPTER IV.

IRMA recovered her wonted cheerfulness and was the merriest sprite of the whole court, teasing and bantering every one except Colonel Bronnen, with whom alone she was always serious and reserved. She rode out a great deal and often accompanied the king in the chase, in which the other court ladies were also glad to join. The advance of autumn rendered the air fresh and bracing, and there was no lack of variety in their amusements. The queen was obliged to remain at home. She had Walpurga and the prince about her for a great part of the time, and was made happy by every new proof of the child's dawning intelligence. He already knew his mother and had begun to notice many objects. She deplored her husband's restless mind, which constantly craved new and violent excitement, and thus deprived him of many delightful moments with his child.

They would often take their meals in the woods or on the mount-

ains, whither their viands and cooking utensils were quickly transported on the backs of mules.

The idea had originated with Baron Schoning, and he was not a little vain of it. It was, indeed, a surprise that almost savored of magic, to find a banquet spread in the heart of the forest, or on some height that commanded a lovely view; and at the end of the feast all of their paraphernalia would as quickly disappear.

Ever since his return from the lake, Baron Schoning had treated Irma with as much forbearance and consideration as if he had refused her, instead of having been refused by her, and he really felt as if he were the one who had said "no." The idea of his ever entertaining thoughts of marriage now seemed to him sheer madness. The Baron endeavored, withal, to assume an air of dignity, but, in doing so, acted very cautiously, lest too sudden a change in his deportment might awaken unpleasant comment. He had told Irma that the court imagined it was trifling with him, while he in reality was playing with it. The bold change which he was now attempting to consummate had, in truth, only suggested itself to him during the conversation referred to.

Schoning was an odd character at court. He had, at the start, entered the diplomatic service, but soon left it, in order to become a landscape artist. His achievements in his new vocation proving of slight merit, he sought, and found it an easy matter to obtain, a position at court. He became one of the directors of the royal gardens and chief in the office of the lord steward and, by virtue of his position, chamberlain also.

In familiar moments, he was fond of telling his intimate friends—and these, of course, included every lady and gentleman at court—that his real vocation was art; that he had only sacrificed it for the sake of the king, whom he loved above all beings; and maintained that this was a duty that the nobles owed their sovereign. A landscape of his, showing a view of the lake, on the borders of which lay Walpurga's birthplace, was hanging in the summer palace. It was a clever picture, but malicious tongues asserted that one of his friends, at the academy, had painted the landscape, and that another had done the figures.

On their mountain excursions, Schoning paid marked attention to Irma, who could freely indulge her wanton humor with him, for it was well understood, at court, that no one could have a love affair with Schoning. He was the butt of every one, and knew how to take, as well as give a joke.

Schoning would, many a time, have liked to avoid taking part in these excursions, for he well knew that his attempts to acquire dignity were far from being successful. But even pretended illness did not serve as an excuse; for, without Schoning, there was no target for their jests. What was he to do? He put the best face possible on the matter and, with feigned willingness, accompanied them.

Notwithstanding the wide difference in their stations, Schoning and Baum were both indispensable.

Baum was the favorite servant at court. He was fortunate enough to be useful in every way and no country party, no dinner in the woods, no excursion on the water, was considered complete without him. Actors are often vexed when they are not sufficiently employed, or are cast for unimportant parts, and lackeys, in the same way, have a jealous desire to be kept ever busy. It follows, as a matter of course, that Baum had his favorites, whom he would, when occasion offered, mention approvingly to the lord steward, and they obeyed him as if he were their natural superior. The queen's shawl, or the king's paletot, were never so well carried as by Baum. While hanging on his arm, they would almost seem to say: "Oh, how warm and soft we are, and we are ready, at any time, to protect and warm you. Your Majesties have only to command us."

The evenings were pleasantly spent. After tea, they would usually repair to the inner palace yard and, by the light of torches, look at the wild beasts that had been shot during the day's hunt. The queen, although loth to behold such sights, would always join the party, lest they might regard her as being sentimental. Success in the chase always put the king in a good humor. They would then return to the open saloons, where they would have instrumental and vocal music, play cards or have some one read to them. Irma was an excellent billiard player, and won many a game from the king. Her every movement was full of grace and every pose that she assumed while playing was worthy of an artist's pencil.

"How beautiful she is," the queen would often say to her husband, who would nod assent. There was much merriment in the great billiard-room. Before parting for the night, the inner circle of the court would gather, as if for rest and retrospection; for, every evening, the chronicle of the day was read aloud. Baron Schoning had conducted this daily journal for many years. It was written in verse and, what was still better, in the Highland dialect. Countess Irma was often mentioned in it, under the name of the "Rock-maiden." All the little events of the day were presented in a comic dress and, as the company knew all the personages referred to, the reading of the journal always occasioned great merriment. The king was usually referred to as Nimrod, or Artus. Nor were the dogs forgotten, and one of the standing jokes was: "Foster-mother Walpurga ate heartily, and Romulus drank copiously. Aunt Lint"—meaning Mademoiselle Kramer—"began to recount her family history, but has not yet reached the end."

After the king and queen had retired, the court would break up into small parties. Accompanied by Doctor Gunther, Irma would often ascend some neighboring height or descend into the valley.

Gunther taught her the constellations ; and here, in the stilly night, he would explain to her the great laws that govern the universe ; how the planets move in infinite space, attracted and repelled, so that none describes a perfect circle. They would often speak of Irma's father who, Gunther maintained, would be able to complete his circle, because he had isolated himself. The Doctor, however, maintained that his own case was different ; that it had been his lot to remain in the world ; that an elliptical course was the only one in which he could move ; and that, being a physician, he was obliged to influence others and was unable to escape their influence on himself. Thus absorbed in the secrets of the universe, the old man and the maiden would forget themselves until fatigue warned them that it was time to return and seek repose.

Irma would often say that she intended to spend much of her time with the Gunthers, during the winter. The young widow and her child had now come home to live with the father.

Irma would rarely retire for the night, without first visiting Walpurga, who would generally lie awake and wait for her, and who, if she had fallen asleep, would, as if conscious of her presence, awaken as soon as Irma drew near. They would sit talking to each other for some time. Walpurga had always much to relate about her clever prince, and still more about the good queen.

The days grew shorter, the evenings longer. The gardeners were kept busy, clearing the fallen leaves from the paths, before the court awoke. It was said they would soon leave the summer palace and return to the capital. The king had preceded them thither. Surrounded by a new ministry, of which Schnabelsdorf was president, he opened the parliament in person.

Gunther felt sorry, and expressed his regrets to Irma, that the king, in appointing a reactionary and ultramontane ministry, had taken a step fraught with serious consequences. In firm and measured language, he inveighed against all the romance of the convent. Irma had not enough courage to confess how much she was to blame in all this and consoled herself with the thought that the king had, in the queen's presence, rejected all outside influence. For the first time, she became conscious of a feeling of antagonism to the Doctor who, in her eyes, now seemed illiberal and filled with the fanaticism of unbelief. He was a stranger to the greatest glory in life, the flights of a soaring soul, and anathematized them by the words "romance" and "sentimentalism." The king, solitary and alone while breasting the torrent of public opinion, seemed to her greater than ever before. The idea that she had once expressed in a letter to Emma, gradually became clearer to her. No one but a king, and such a one as he, has the large and comprehensive mind that will not suffer itself to be cramped by the systems of the schools. Logic is only part of the human mind. The complete man alone possesses a complete mind.

Even such a mind and-such a man as the Doctor, seemed to her to suffer by comparison with the only one.

Walpurga was quite uneasy on account of the second change of residence, and complained to Irma that it was a fearful life. "Why, it's nothing but living in carriages. You never get a chance to feel settled anywhere. It do n't seem right to go and come in this way. Of course, they drive the cattle away from the mountain-meadows when the grass is gone, but cattle are n't human beings. I can't help pitying my poor prince, for there's nothing in his youth worth remembering. When he gets older, he won't be able to say: 'I used to be at home here, and saw these trees blossom and bear fruit; and then the snow covered them, and, after that, the spring came'—and if the poor child has n't that, where'll it ever have a home?"

At breakfast, Irma repeated Walpurga's words, and found much that was affecting and poetical in this identifying one's self with nature, and in this attachment to lifeless objects. The ladies and gentlemen in the breakfast-room could not understand where the poetry lay, for, to them, it seemed narrow-mindedness. Baron Schoning interposed, and reminded them that this attachment to the soil possessed its advantages; for it was thus alone that solitary heights and valleys were inhabited. He maintained that the common people could only be governed by the force of habit; that man, as a free agent, must rid himself of such restraint; and that the true poetic idea was that of Pegasus resting on the earth, but yet able to wing his flight aloft.

Schoning looked about him as if he expected applause for his profound remark. It failed, however, to produce an impression. He had so constantly ministered to the amusement of the court, that all his attempts to be serious were failures, suggesting the success with which a well-known comedian or country bumpkin would undertake a tragic rôle. Schoning imagined that Irma understood him better than any of the ladies, but even she was not in a humor to assent that day. Walpurga was the first to take up the conversation, saying that the present desire for incessant travel constituted a new impulse in the history of mankind, and one which no former age had known to the same extent. The generation which, even in its cradle, had heard the whistle of the locomotive, must, of necessity, be different from its predecessors. But yet poetry would never die, for every mother would teach her child to sing, and time, the everlasting mother, would teach unto the children of a new generation, new songs, different from those of the past but none the less full of beauty and feeling.

The queen nodded to Gunther, and her face was mantled with blushes, while she said that she agreed with Walpurga, and would rather remain in one place and become settled there.

The gentlemen and ladies of the court were loud in their praise

of the queen's beautiful and feeling remarks, while, in their hearts, many considered them just as foolish as Walpurga's.

When they had left the table, the queen said to Irma:

"Dear Countess, you should n't say such things at table, or in the presence of company. Let me assure you, they are out of place there. Walpurga's thoughts are like fresh wild-flowers, which, when plucked and bound into a bouquet, soon wither and die. It is only artificially cultivated flowers that are adapted for the *salon*, and the best of all are those made of tulle and gauze. Hereafter, confide such things to me alone."

Irma was delighted with this agreement; but when, at noon, the queen told Walpurga what she had heard about her, the latter was angry at Irma. It won't do, thought she, to repeat everything you hear. She felt ashamed of herself, and became shy and reserved in Irma's presence. It was only when she was alone with the prince, that she whispered: "Yes, my little wanderer; after this, you shall be the only one to whom I'll tell everything. You're the cleverest in the whole house, and the only one who holds his tongue. You won't say a word to any one, will you?"

Walpurga was quite troubled by the idea of leaving, and Baum was the only one who knew how to pacify her. He said:

"Do n't be foolish. What do the furniture and the trees and all the rest matter to you? They remain here. You step into the carriage and ride to the city and, when you get there, find all you need, ready for you. There are hands and feet enough to attend to all that."

Walpurga gradually quieted herself. They waited for the first sunny day, and then the queen, the prince, Walpurga and the royal suite drove to the capital. The summer palace was once more lonely and deserted; dead leaves filled the paths in the park and were no longer swept away. The great colored lamps of the verandah were put away for safe keeping, and the large windows were covered with layers of snow. The summer palace entered on its winter sleep, and, meanwhile, new life awakened at the city palace.

CHAPTER V.

THE royal palace was in the centre of the city, and was without walls or fosse. Although its windows looked down on the busy streets, it seemed as if it stood on some fortified height, and as if outworks for offense and defense surrounded it for some distance. It was only at rare intervals, and in indistinct utterances, that a stray echo of popular feeling penetrated so far. There were hundreds of human beings, from the lowest kitchen servant up to the major-domo, who served in place of wall or fosse, and prevented all except the favored few from entering the royal presence.

The king was in a happy mood and yet his cheerfulness seemed forced. He was a prey to a restless disposition which would not permit him to dwell long on any one subject. From morning till night, he required constant change and gay excitement.

If he had been asked to answer on his conscience, he would frankly have said: "I respect the constitution and am faithful to it"—and yet, at heart, he was unconquerably opposed to it, for it cramped his individuality. It was in the same way that he loved his wife, while his heart paid homage to her friend; but that he should be subjected to the law, or even to his own desires, was equally distasteful to him—for that, too, would retard the full development of his new individuality. He regarded all that savored of opposition, whether it was the constitution of the state or the opinion of a kind friend, as an attempt to subjugate him. He desired to be perfectly free and yet not without law and affection. He could not forego the approbation of those to whom he was, at the same time, unwilling to accord the right to dissent. He would have liked his own people to regard him with as loyal an affection as that which the English bestow upon their rulers; but did not care to have it interfere with his following the dictates of his own judgment. He studied the laws of the state, but favored such interpretations thereof as rendered them nugatory. He loved the constitution, much as he did his wife; that is, he prized her virtues, and aimed to be faithful to her without sacrificing his inclinations.

The journals of the day reached the king in the form of an abstract, which was prepared in the literary court-kitchen. By his orders, stenographic reports of the proceedings of the Chamber of Deputies were brought to his cabinet, but for the greater part they remained unread. There was too much to be done, too much of ceremonious receptions, parading and exercises. The new arsenal was now under roof, and they were engaged in supplying the decorations, devices for some of which were prepared by the king himself.

The great autumn manœuvres took place near the palace. There was much talk of changes, and, among the soldiers, great enthusiasm thereat. The queen and Irma, attired in the uniform of the queen's guards, appeared on horseback. The queen looked like a patron saint, while Irma, with her triumphant air, looked like a commander. At the word of command, the huzzas of the soldiers filled the air, and it seemed as if their joyous shouts would never end.

Colonel Bronnen was quite devoted in his attentions to Irma. It was generally believed that he would, before long, sue for her hand. Some even went so far as to assert that they were already secretly betrothed, and that Irma's father, the old misanthrope, had refused his consent, but that the beautiful countess would be of age within a month. No regiment could have wished for a more beautiful colonel's wife.

Irma's life seemed to glide on in ecstatic happiness. She did not even know that the world had betrothed her. When she met the Doctor, she would say: "I think of visiting your dear family, every day, but there is always something to prevent me; I'll surely come to-morrow, or the day after."

Weeks passed before she paid the visit, and when she did call, the servant informed her that the family were not at home. Irma had intended to call again, and finally concluded that they had treated her rudely in neglecting to return her visit. She waited, and, at last, dropped all intercourse with them. It is far better, she thought, in one's own sphere; aside from this, they were in mourning at the Doctor's, and Irma was not in the mood to seek sorrowful scenes. The Doctor himself even appeared ill at ease, for he had recently said to her:

"Most persons, even those who are matured and self-conscious, exhaust their joys, just as children do. Like them, they indulge their love of pleasure without stint, and then follows the reaction, when joy is followed by tears." Irma avoided all further discussion with him.

Rainy days came, and no one could leave the house. Walpurga would go about as if a prisoner, longing to be at the summer palace, although, if she had been there at that season of the year, she would have been obliged to remain indoors. "Uncle was right," said she, jestingly, to Mademoiselle Kramer. "At the christening, he said I was a cow, and now I can fancy how a cow must feel, when it comes down from the mountain meadows to its stall in the valley. Grubersepp, who lives at our place, has a mountain meadow and whenever his cows are brought home, they keep on lowing for three days, and won't eat a thing. If I only knew how things are at home; if I only felt sure that they keep my child indoors; but I'll write at once."

Walpurga wrote an anxious, sorrowful letter and was not content until good tidings came in.

Whenever Irma entered her own prince's apartments, even in the gloomiest weather, her presence seemed like sunshine. There was rarely a day that she did not come, although her visits were shorter than they had been. She said that the preparations for her brother's wedding took up so much of her time.

"I'd like to see your father," said Walpurga, one day; "he must be a splendid man to have such good and beautiful children."

Irma pressed her hand to her heart.

"If father comes I'll bring him to you," said she, as if to silence her. The innocent remark of this simple-minded woman had deeply moved her, and the anticipation of brilliant festivities gave way to sad and sombre thoughts. She was often in the city, either alone or attended by her brother, while making purchases for a complete and luxuriously furnished household. Women in

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large towns find as much pleasure in shopping as children in the woods do in gathering wild flowers. To go from shop to shop to compare, to select, to purchase—it is just like plucking flowers. Irma was enough of a child and woman of the world to delight in this, and to enjoy the pleasure of furnishing a house according to her own taste. The workmen and shopkeepers exaggerated nothing when they said that they had never before met one whose orders showed such excellent judgment. Irma was not amiable and gracious, she was simply courteous. She never apologized for the trouble she gave the shopkeepers and workmen, for that was part of their business. She addressed them respectfully, freely expressed her approval, when their suggestions were in good taste, and thanked them for correcting her, when her demands were impracticable.

Could Irma have heard how sewing-women, workmen and shopmen praised her, it would have gladdened her heart.

It struck her as very singular that every one would make the mistake of speaking of the new establishment as her own, and not as her brother's.

The wedding was solemnized. Irma had no opportunity of introducing her father to Walpurga, for he did not come. During those few days, she neglected to visit the crown prince's apartments, and when she again went—she had dreaded Walpurga's questions—the nurse made no allusion to the wedding or to her father.

Irma felt that Mademoiselle Kramer had informed Walpurga of the state of affairs. She would gladly have placed matters before her in their true light, but that were impracticable. The common people could only understand simple relations, and an involved and complicated story, such as hers, would pass Walpurga's comprehension. Irma forced herself to appear the same to Walpurga as she had always been. The latter observed this, although she said nothing about it. She, too, had become strangely reserved.

Winter came in all its might. Walpurga could not go out into the open air, but found pleasure in taking long walks with the crown prince, inside the palace. A whole suite of apartments had been thrown open and heated for this purpose.

"You may sing if you like," the Doctor had said to her. But Walpurga could not utter a sound in the grand saloons, for she was afraid of the pictures of men in coats of mail, and of women with stiff ruffs or bare necks, who were looking down upon her.

"I know what I am going to say is very stupid, and you must promise not to repeat it," said she, one day, in confidence to Irma.

"What is it? You can always tell me everything."

"It's very silly, I'm sure, but it seems to me as if those men and women can't find rest in the other world and have got to be here all the time and look on at what happens."

"That is n't at all stupid," said Irma, smiling. "But, pay attention, Walpurga, to what I am about to tell you. To stand here, and feel that your father, your great-grandfather, and others still further back, are looking at you—that's what is meant by nobility. Thus, we are always in the company of our ancestors."

"I understand; it's just the same as if, in your heart, you were always saying a mass for the repose of their souls."

"That's it, exactly."

Irma thought of repeating this conversation to the queen. But, no; she would tell it to the king. His was a truly poetic and exalted conception of all things. Irma had accustomed herself to tell the king all that happened to her. She spoke to him of all her thoughts, and of every book that she read, and thus found all her experiences invested with a twofold interest. He was so grateful, so appreciative, so happy, and was, moreover, so burdened down with the cares of state that it was a duty to cheer him with other thoughts.

At the summer palace, the trees were covered with snow and the windows were protected with straw; but in the palace at the capital, pleasure reigned supreme. Here all was fragrance, splendor, glitter, and, in Bruno's house, it seemed as if the feasting would never end. The court had honored the opening fête with their presence and, throughout the city, all spoke of the queen's great kindness, in visiting a sister-in-law of so peculiar a kind, and of her having, in the most affable and friendly manner, actually sat on the same sofa with her. The old Baroness had also wished to attend the first fête given by her children, but, having been informed that, in that case, the queen would not come, she remained at her castle in the little country town.

Arabella had written to Bruno's father. Her husband had not forbidden her doing so, but he had told her, beforehand, that she would receive no answer. He had every reason to feel assured of this, for he had never forwarded the letter.

Irma consoled her, and found it painful to offer such a description of her father's peculiarities as would satisfactorily account for his silence. It seemed like treachery, but she could not help it, for why should the poor child be made to suffer. But fête succeeded fête with such rapidity, that the father, the whilom dancer—aye, even her own thoughts, were soon forgotten.

The Chamber of Deputies was not far from the royal stables, and, while the delegates were heatedly discussing so-called decisive questions, the royal riding school was the scene of a rehearsal for a tournament in the knightly costume of the Middle Ages. Prince Arnold who, as the story went, was wooing princess Angelica, was chief of the gentlemen, and Irma of the ladies.

Although it was merely by accident that the tournament opened on the evening of the day on which the Chamber was dissolved,

the circumstance occasioned much ironical comment throughout the capital.

Irma was the central figure in the brilliant scene. When she entered the royal box, the king lavished loud praise upon her beauty and skill.

The queen added her praises to his and said :

"You must feel happy, Countess Irma, to think that you afford us so much pleasure."

Irma bowed low and kissed the queen's hand.

There was hardly time to rest from one fête, before another succeeded it. The grand sleighing-party, which was especially brilliant, excited the whole city. The king and the queen drove in an open sleigh, and, in spite of their dissatisfaction with the policy of the government, the citizens were delighted to see the royal couple so happy. Following immediately after the sleigh of the prince of the house came that of Bruno and his handsome wife ; but, rich as were the trappings and handsome as were the couple, all glances were quickly turned to the next sleigh in which sat Irma and Baron Schoning. She had pitched upon him as the most convenient dummy. The countenances of the lookers-on were expressive of mingled surprise and derision.

"If Hansei could only see it ! How I wish he could ! One would hardly believe it !" said Walpurga, as she looked out of her window at the sleighing-party.

No one had noticed her but Irma, who nodded to her. How radiant she was ; she had never looked so beautiful. The clear cold air of winter had wondrously animated her features. She was sitting in a swan, drawn by two white horses, and Walpurga said to herself : "Oh, you dear creature ! You just look as if you could n't help riding to heaven ; but you 'll never marry that clown aside of you." The last words she had uttered in quite a loud voice.

"She won't marry at all," said a voice behind her.

Walpurga looked around, startled. Baum had been standing behind her.

"What an everlasting eaves-dropper you are," said she. All her joy had been imbibed, but this did not last long, for Irma soon came and said :

"Walpurga, I can only warm myself with you. It is bitter cold, and you're like a good warm stove. You're growing as fat and as broad as a Dutch oven."

Walpurga was delighted with her friend. She was always coming to see her, and allowing her to share in all her pleasures.

But Walpurga started with fright, when the king suddenly entered. Courteously bowing to Irma, he said :

"A letter has just come for you ; I thought I would bring it myself."

Irma looked down, while she took the letter.

"Pray open it," said the king, while he motioned Walpurga to follow him into the prince's room. When he came out again, the king said :

"Did the letter bring you good news?"

Irma looked at him with surprise, and at last said : "It was from my dearest friend."

The king nodded, as if pleased that the letter, which had been written by himself, should receive such an answer. He added, in a careless tone :

"Dear Countess, you will, of course, feel sad at parting from Walpurga, but her situation must necessarily end with time. Think of some other position for her, so that you may keep her near you."

Walpurga drew a long breath. "Give me the farm," lay on her lips, but she could not utter the words. She felt as if her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth.

The king soon took his leave. He always came and went so quickly.

"No, you shall not remain here," said Irma when she was alone with Walpurga. "It is better, a thousand times better for you, that you should go home again. Next summer, I'll come to see you. I'll never forget you. Rely upon it."

Walpurga now felt bold enough to express her wishes in regard to the farm ; but Irma was immovable. "You know nothing about these things. Take my word for it—it will be far better for you, if you go home again."

CHAPTER VI.

"HOW do you live in the country in winter?" asked the queen while she sat by the cradle of her child.

"Well enough," replied Walpurga, "but wood is getting to be quite dear. We're glad when spring returns. To be sure, my Hansei has good earnings in the winter, when the wood can be brought down the snow road to the valley. Mother always says our Lord's the greatest of all road masters, for He can make roads and make it easy to bring the wood where no man can."

"You have a good mother. Give her my love, and when I again go to the mountains, I shall visit her."

"Oh, if you only would!"

"And now," resumed the queen, "tell me how you pass your time during the winter."

"When the housework for the day is done, the women spin. The men spend the day in the forest, cutting wood and, when night comes, they're so tired that they hardly ever cut kindling-wood."

"And do you sing much at such times?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"And do you never read to each other?"

"No, never. But we like to tell stories, and frighten each other as much as we can."

"And do you sometimes dance?"

"Yes, at carnival time; but there's not much of that nowadays. They say it used to be much better in old times."

"Do you never find the day hang heavy on your hands?"

"No, never; we've no time for that."

The queen smiled when she looked at the astral lamp that stood on the table, and thought of the many expedients that society employed to kill time.

The queen at length said: "And do you feel quite sure that your husband is always true to you? Do you never think of his being otherwise?"

"Mother often says that the men are all good for nothing, but she says my Hansei's not like the rest of 'em. He'd be heartily ashamed of himself if he spoke a loving word to another woman. It would haunt him day and night, and he'd never be able to look any one in the face again. He's not one of your sharp, clever folks—far from it; but he's good, thoroughly good at heart; a little bit close in money matters, and he's always afraid that, some time or other, we might come to want. However, one who has to save every kreutzer can easily get used to that. But, thank God, that's over, now."

When Walpurga had once begun to talk, she would, unless interrupted, run on like a mountain spring. She had a thousand and one little stories to tell.—How she had, for the first time, bought three geese, two white and one gray; how many feathers she got from them, and what a good price she obtained for the feathers; and that she now had eight ducks—they were much more useful than geese, and required but little food; and that her goat was wondrous clever. They had once had a sheep, but that was nothing. They belong in flocks and don't thrive well alone. At last, Walpurga said that she could hardly believe that they really had two cows of their own in the stable. She had never, in all her life, even wished for so much. And then she spoke of the innkeeper and said that, although one could n't trust him, it was necessary to keep on good terms with him, for, if he was your enemy, you might as well be put out of the village and the principal house would be closed to you. The innkeeper would, once in a while, do you a favor, if he lost nothing by it. He had paid a good price for her ducks and fish, and if you should happen to need it, you could always get a little from him on trust. She did n't want to speak ill of him, but he had once been impudent to her; but she had taught him a lesson that he'd remember as long as he

lived. She hoped the queen would n't do anything to him for that; he was good enough, after all, considering that he was an innkeeper. But there were ever so many good people in their neighborhood. They did n't give anything away, and she would n't want their gifts, but when you know that on every hillside there are people who feel kindly towards you, it makes the whole neighborhood seem as if it were one warm room.

The queen smiled.

Walpurga went on talking. The more she talked, the more the child prattled and crowed and clapped its hands; the sound of his nurse's voice pleased him and Walpurga said:

"He's just like a canary bird; when there's lots of chattering in the room, he joins in with his merry song. Is n't it so, you canary bird?" said she, shaking her head at the child, while it crowed yet more lustily than before.

Buried in thought, the queen passed her hand over her face several times. Walpurga's words had transported her into another world. And so, thought she, there are other beings, beneath me and far away, who pass their days in work and care and yet are happy.

"What makes you look so sad?" asked Walpurga.

Her question had recalled the queen to herself. No one had ever read her face in this way. No one could, or would have questioned her thus.

The queen made no answer, and Walpurga continued:

"Oh, my dear queen, I can't help thinking you must have a hard time of it. To have plenty of everything is n't so good for one after all. It's like having your heaven on earth. Have you never felt lonely and lorn? When one wakes to sorrow and thinks that one still has sound limbs, and can work, and can see the sun and know that there are still good people in the world—it's then that you really feel at home in the world. Oh, my dear queen, do n't be sad. You could n't, if you knew how happy you ought to feel."

The queen was silent for a long while. There must have been something in Walpurga that suggested the thought, for she at last said: "They play William Tell to-night. I would like you to go to the theatre, for once."

Walpurga said:

"I'd like to go, well enough. Mademoiselle Kramer has told me a great deal about it; it must be splendid, but I can't take the child with me, and I can't leave it alone for so long a time. See how he listens, and what a cross voice he has already. He understands everything we say, I'll bet my head on it."

The boy began to cry. Walpurga took him up in her arms, fondled him and sang:

I won't leave you a minute,
To see the finest play;
It's better far, and safer,
If at home with you I stay.

The little prince was soon quieted and fell asleep.

"Yes, you're right," said the queen, after a pause. "Remain just as you are, and when you go home again, don't think of what is past. Only think that your lot is the best in the world."

The queen left. Walpurga felt like telling Mademoiselle Kramer that the queen was very sad, and was about to ask what could be the matter; but, with clever tact, she refrained from alluding to the subject. The queen had been so confiding and so sisterly with her, that it would not do to speak of it to any one else; and perhaps, too, the queen did not wish others to know that she was sad.

For many days, there was a pilgrimage of court ladies and gentlemen to Walpurga for the sake of seeing something that was quite new to them. Doctor Gunther had given Walpurga permission to get a distaff and spin. To see a spinning-wheel in use seemed like a fairy-tale. Few of the ladies and gentlemen had ever seen such a thing before, and now they came and looked on wonderingly. Walpurga, however, always laughed merrily when she wound a fresh thread on the spindle. All the court came to look at the distaff, and Schoning declared that this was the implement with which Little Thornrose had injured herself.

Irma was again the object of envy, for she, too, knew how to spin and, like a village neighbor, would sometimes come and join threads for Walpurga. They both sat spinning at the same distaff, and, while they worked, their voices joined in merry songs.

"What's to be done with what we spin?" asked Irma.

Walpurga was vexed, for the question had destroyed the charm. She said: "Little shirts for my prince; but they must only be of my spinning." After that, she laid the bobbins which Irma had filled in a separate place. The threads which she had moistened with her own lips, should be the only ones used by the prince.

Irma could not help telling Baron Schoning of Walpurga's plan, and it suggested to him a poem, in which he alluded to the legend of a fairy, or enchanted princess, who was spinning flax for her darling. The queen was delighted with the poem, and, for the first time, and with perfect sincerity, praised the Baron's verses.

Walpurga was sitting at her distaff and telling the prince in the cradle the story of the King of the Carps, who swims about at the bottom of the lake. He's more than seven thousand years old, wears a crown on his head, has a great long beard and, up over him, millions of fishes are swimming about and playing tag with each other; and when one's naughty and envious and quarrelsome and disobedient, the naughty pike comes and eats him, and then comes

the fisherman who catches the pike, and then comes the cook who cuts up the pike, and then all the little fishes jump out and go back into the lake and come to life and tell all that 's happened to them, how dark it was in the pike's belly and how much brighter it is in the sea and, in the meanwhile, the pike is cut in pieces and eaten, and if one 's not very careful, he 'll get a fish bone in his mouth, and that 'll make him cough, and Walpurga coughed with great skill.

The door suddenly opened and, to Walpurga's great alarm, a handsome young officer entered, went straight up to her, saluted her in military fashion, and, while twirling his moustache, asked :

"Have I the honor of addressing the magic spinner, named Walpurga Andermatten, from the cottage by the lake?"

"Yes; dear me, what can be the matter?"

"I am sent by the spirit Kussschmatzky, and he commands me to kiss you three times in order to break a spell."

Walpurga trembled. It was her own fault. Why had she told the child so many fairy-tales, and now it had all come true. All at once, the officer threw his arms about her neck, and kissed her with all his might, and then laughed until he could no longer stand, and seating himself, exclaimed :

"And so you really do n't know me? That 's splendid. Do n't you know your friend Irma, any more?"

"You rogue! You good-for-nothing rogue," burst out Walpurga. "Pardon me, Countess Irma, but who 'd have thought of such a thing; and you threw me into such a fright! What 's it all about? Is it carnival time already?"

"Walpurga, if you understood the language, you might see me in a French play this evening. The king is also going to act. I 'm sorry, for I 'd rather have had you in the audience than any of the rest. But I 've had sufficient applause already; you did n't know me. I 'm glad of that at all events."

"And I 'm heartily sorry," said Walpurga, becoming quite serious. "Oh, dear Countess, do you know what you 're doing? It 's the greatest sin to put on men's clothes, for then the devil 's master over one. Do n't laugh at me! I 'm not so silly as you think. It 's just as true as can be. Grubersepp's grandfather had a daughter, and she had a sweetheart who was off at the wars, and while she was sitting in the room spinning, just as I was a little while ago, a girl dressed herself up in soldier's clothes, and went into the room and acted just as if she was the sweetheart himself. Grubersepp's daughter fainted, but got over it again and the disguised girl ran away. And as soon as she got out of the house, there were hundreds of men with whips and horses' heads, and they chased her ever so far and, at last, the devil caught her, tore her to pieces and threw her into the lake. Yes, it 's a true story; you can take my word for it. There are people enough living to this day who knew her."

"You're enough to make one quite melancholy," said Irma.

"Perhaps such things only happen with us," said Walpurga, as if to console her. "The soldiers out there, with their swords and muskets, would n't let the devil enter here; but, my dear, good Countess, do n't you feel ashamed to wear those clothes before so many people?"

"You belong to a different world from ours. You're right, and so are we," said Irma, walking up and down the room quickly and rattling her spurs. "No, Walpurga, do n't alarm yourself about me, and do n't take your fright so much to heart."

She was again the same careless, true-hearted creature that she had ever been, and Walpurga could not help saying:

"Oh, how beautiful! you look just like a prince."

Walpurga's eyes rested on the door long after Irma had left. It seemed to her as if it had all been a dream.

Many days passed by, and Irma was always blithe and cheerful when with Walpurga. They would sing and spin, and the king and queen once came together—they had never done so before—and seated themselves by the child's cradle, while they looked at, and listened to, the workers. Walpurga was timid at first, but, after awhile, sang quite cheerfully.

A veritable surprise was in store for Walpurga. Christmas eve arrived. The manner in which it was observed at her home, had been transplanted hither by the queen. Walpurga and the child were conducted into the great saloon, where the Christmas tree was all ablaze with lights, and where there also were many rich presents.

It seemed to her as if she were in a fairy grotto; there was so much glitter and sparkle, and the presents were so rich and varied. The child shouted for joy and was ever putting out its little hands to grasp the lights. Walpurga received lavish gifts, but, although the dazzling gold and the rich garnet necklace with golden clasp delighted her, a well-arranged table covered with clothing pleased her more than all the rest. There was a complete winter suit for Walpurga's mother, another, with a beautiful green hat, for Han-sei, and many articles of clothing for little Burgei.

"Does it all please you?" asked the queen. "I sent to your village to get the measure."

"Oh, how it does please me!" said Walpurga; "if I could thank you as many times as there are threads in these clothes, it would n't be enough."

A thought suddenly occurred to her, and she sent Baum to her room to get the yarn which was hanging there. He soon returned with it and, presenting it to the queen, in the king's presence, she said: "As often as I've wetted each thread with my lips, do I thank you. I shall pray for you as long as I can move my lips, and all will go well with you."

The king held out his hand to her and said: "You're a good soul, but do n't excite yourself so." She pressed his hand firmly.

Walpurga was sitting in her room, late at night, when the queen came to her.

"I'm glad you've come," said Walpurga, softly.

"Why? Does anything ail the child?"

"No; thank God, he's quiet. See how he clenches his little fists while he sleeps. But, on this night, at twelve, a Sunday child sees everything. He can hear all that the angels in heaven and the beasts in the wood are saying. One must always be with him at that time, and keep on saying the paternoster, and then no harm will come to him."

"Yes, I'll stay with you; that can do no harm. But you must not torment yourself so with your belief."

Walpurga looked at the queen with a strange expression.

"Ah, she knows nothing of this," she thought to herself. "She was n't born in our faith." The queen said: "I'm glad that I can make so many people happy, just as I've made you happy, to-day."

"But you must be happy, too," said Walpurga. "Take my word for it—I'd put my hand in the fire as a pledge—there's nothing wrong with Irma. She's true, and so is the king."

The queen started convulsively. And had it come to this pass? Must she receive consolation from such a quarter? She sat there motionless, for some time. The clock struck twelve, and, at the same instant, bells were heard ringing from every tower, filling the air with their merry sounds.

The child in the cradle began to mutter in its sleep. Walpurga made a sign to the queen and went on repeating the Lord's Prayer, in a firm voice. The queen moved her lips and silently joined in the prayer. When it was repeated for the third time, she said aloud: "'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'" Then she knelt down by the child's cradle, and buried her face in the pillow.

Walpurga was filled with reverence for the mother who thus knelt silently at her child's cradle. She went on praying in a low voice. The queen arose, nodded to Walpurga, and waved both her hands to her. She looked almost like a spirit and, without uttering another word, she left the room. The sound of the bells died on the air, and the child slept on quietly.

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE things were always happening during the days and nights of Christmas week. Some mortals maintain that the kingdom of the fairies has vanished, but it still exists.

In a large building, standing back from the king's street, there

are silent workmen, placing strange wedges side by side, which wedges are afterward handed over to a huge monster. It is still at rest, but as soon as it receives them, it suddenly moves, creaks, groans and puffs, and, in an instant, hundreds of human beings are, as it were, created anew.—In other words, it is the government printing-office, and they are printing the official gazette, which, at the beginning of every year, announces the promotion and the orders conferred upon hundreds of individuals.

What is New Year's day to most mortals? Retrospection, reflections that life is but transitory, succeeded by joy at what is still left us, and good resolutions for the future; and yet to-morrow is a mere repetition of yesterday.

How different with those whose importance depends upon their station, and who can be elevated into something more than they now are.

The official gazette appeared, with its list of New Year's gifts. One pleasure fell to the lot of the queen. Her English teacher, an estimable and noble-hearted old man, whom she had brought with her as her private secretary, received the title of privy counselor, and was thus, in a social sense, rendered capable of being presented at court.

But of all the promotions, none excited so much comment at court and in the capital, as the appointment of Baron Schoning to the office of intendant-general of the royal theatre, and he, himself, was more surprised than all others. Although he had been greatly applauded for his share in the French play, in which Irma had also taken part, he had not anticipated such a result. When he read the announcement, he rubbed his eyes, to make sure of being awake. Was it a bit of royal pleasantry? He would willingly submit to any joke, but then it must be in a confined circle, not in the eyes of the world. But it was not a joke, it was the simple truth, for, side by side with his own, he could read of the appointment and the promotion of many distinguished men to important positions.

It was an actual fact—beautiful reality.

In the city it was said, with a significant smile, that the Baron had received the appointment in order to place him in the proper position to marry Countess Irma. Others, who were less kindly disposed, asserted that it was freely offered to the gallant court fool, as the court had always regarded theatrical matters as a sort of time-honored buffoonery, furnishing amusement of a light and trivial character.

But Baron Schoning—or, as he must now be styled, the intendant—received the visits of his subordinates with great dignity and then drove to the palace.

On the way, he was obliged to pass Countess Irma's apartments. He stopped and sent in his card.

The Countess received him kindly, and offered him her sincere congratulations. He plainly intimated that he, in a great measure, owed his promotion to her, and he remarked that a lady of good taste and true artistic feeling could be his greatest aid and support in his new calling. She affected not to understand him and assented, in an absent manner. Her thoughts were wandering. She would often look out of the window that opened on the park. The snow had almost disappeared and the marble statues of gods and goddesses had thrown off their winter covering. Nearest her window, and in a position which showed its profile, stood the Venus de Milo.

"Pardon me," said she, at last, as if collecting her thoughts, "I am delighted that you have again resumed your connection with art, and would be very glad to have a talk with you on the subject. Above all things, let me beg of you to let us have music again at the theatre; if not during the *entr'actes*, before the performance, at all events.

"The musicians are all opposed to such a course."

"I know that very well. Each art endeavors to isolate itself, to remain independent of all others. But a play without music is like a feast without wine. Music cleanses the soul from the dust and dross of every day life and seems to say to every one: 'You are no longer in your office, in the barracks, or in the workshop.' If it could be done, I would prescribe a special costume for all who frequent the theatre. Their uncovered heads should be a token of spiritual reverence, and, besides that, I would have theatrical performances only once a week."

"You are perfectly right as regards the music," interposed the intendant. "If you have any other suggestion, dear Countess—"

"Some other time. I know of nothing at present. Just now, my mind is full of the *bal costumé*, which is to take place next week."

The ball was to be given in the palace and the adjoining winter garden. The intendant now informed Irma of his plan, and was delighted to find that she approved of it. At the end of the garden, he intended to erect a large fountain, ornamented with antique groups. In the foreground, he meant to have trees and shrubbery and various kinds of rocks, so that none could approach too closely, and the background was to be a Grecian landscape, painted in the grand style.

Irma promised to keep his secret. Suddenly, she exclaimed: "We are, all of us, no better than lackeys and kitchen-maids. We are kept busy, stewing, roasting and cooking for weeks, in order to prepare a dish that may please their majesties."

The intendant made no reply.

"Do you remember," continued Irma, "how, when we were at the lake, we spoke of the fact that man possessed the advantage

of being able to change his dress, and thus to alter his appearance? While yet a child, masquerading was my greatest delight. The soul wings its flight in callow infancy. A *bal costumé* is, indeed, one of the noblest fruits of culture. The love of coquetry which is innate with all of us, there displays itself undisguised."

The intendant took his leave; while walking away, his mind was filled with his old thoughts about Irma.

"No," said he to himself, "such a woman would be a constant strain, and would require one to be brilliant and intellectual all day long. She would exhaust one," said he, almost aloud.

No one knew what character Irma intended to appear in, although many supposed that it would be as Victoria, since it was well known that she had stood for the model of the statue that surmounted the arsenal. They were busy conjecturing how she could assume that character, without violating the social proprieties.

Irma spent much of her time in the atelier and worked assiduously. She was unable to escape a feeling of unrest, far greater than that she had experienced years ago, when looking forward to her first ball. She could not reconcile herself to the idea of preparing for the fête, so long beforehand, and would like to have had it take place in the very next hour, so that something else might be taken up at once. The long delay tried her patience. She almost envied those beings to whom the preparation for pleasure affords the greatest part of the enjoyment. Work alone calmed her unrest. She had something to do, and this prevented the thoughts of the festival from engaging her mind during the day. It was only in the evenings that she would recompense herself for the day's work, by giving full swing to her fancy.

The statue of Victory was still in the atelier and was almost finished. High ladders were placed beside it. The artist was still chiseling at the figure and would, now and then, hurry down to observe the general effect and then hastily mount the ladder again in order to add a touch here or there. Irma scarcely ventured to look up at this effigy of herself in Grecian costume—transformed and yet herself. The idea of being thus translated into the purest of art's forms filled her with a tremor—half joy, half fear.

It was on a winter afternoon. Irma was working assiduously at a copy of a bust of Theseus, for it was growing dark.

Near her, stood her preceptor's marble bust of Doctor Gunther. All was silent; not a sound was heard save, now and then, the picking or scratching of the chisel. At that moment, the master descended the ladder and, drawing a deep breath, said:

"There—that will do. One can never finish. I shall not put another stroke to it. I am afraid that retouching would only injure it. It is done."

In the master's words and manner, struggling effort and calm

content seem mingled. He laid the chisel aside. Irma looked at him earnestly and said :

"You are a happy man ; but I can imagine that you are still unsatisfied. I do n't believe that even Raphael or Michael Angelo were ever satisfied with the work they had completed. The remnant of dissatisfaction which an artist feels at the completion of a work, is the germ of a new creation."

The master nodded his approval of her words. His eyes expressed his thanks. He went to the hydrant and washed his hands. Then he placed himself near Irma and looked at her, while telling her that, in every work, an artist parts with a portion of his life ; that the figure will never again inspire the same feelings that it did while in the workshop. Viewed from afar, and serving as an ornament, no regard would be had to the care bestowed upon details. But the artist's great satisfaction in his work is in having pleased himself ; and yet no one can accurately determine how, or to what extent, a conscientious working up of details will influence the general effect.

While the master was speaking, the king was announced. Irma hurriedly spread a damp cloth over her clay model.

The king entered. He was unattended, and begged Irma not to allow herself to be disturbed in her work. Without looking up, she went on with her modeling. The king was earnest in his praise of the master's work.

"The grandeur that dwells in this figure will show posterity what our days have beheld. I am proud of such contemporaries."

Irma felt that the words applied to her as well. Her heart throbbed. The plaster of Paris which stood before her suddenly seemed to gaze at her with a strange expression.

"I should like to compare the finished work with the first models," said the king to the artist.

"I regret that the experimental models are in my small atelier. Does Your Majesty wish me to have them brought here ?"

"If you will be good enough to do so."

The master left. The king and Irma were alone. With rapid steps, he mounted the ladder and exclaimed, in a tremulous voice :

"I ascend into heaven—I ascend to you. Irma, I kiss you, I kiss your image, and may this kiss forever rest upon those lips, enduring beyond all time. I kiss thee, with the kiss of eternity." He stood aloft and kissed the lips of the statue. Irma could not help looking up, and, just at that moment, a slanting sunbeam fell on the king and on the face of the marble figure, making it glow as if with life.

Irma felt as if wrapped in a fiery cloud, bearing her away into eternity.

The king descended and placed himself beside her. His breathing was short and quick—she did not dare to look up—she stood as

silent and as immovable as the statue. Then the king embraced her—she lay in his arms and living lips kissed each other.

When the artist returned, the king was alone. Irma crossed the street, on her way to the palace, as if dreaming. She felt herself borne on wings, and likened herself to Semele whom the ardent kisses of Jupiter had made immortal.

"The greatest happiness has been mine," said she to herself. "I can easily give up all else, for the kiss of eternity rests upon my lips."

The people and the houses seemed like so many shadowy forms, and she felt as if flying through the air above them.

It was not until she had gained her apartment and beheld her costume, that she was reminded of the ball that was to take place that very night. Her lips were wreathed in smiles, while her maid attired her in the full, cloud-like, white robe, trimmed with rushes set with diamonds.

"My lady promised the crown prince's nurse," said the maid, "that she should see her in her ball-dress. Shall I send for her now?"

Irma nodded assent. All that she heard seemed as if in a dream; all that she saw, as if in a cloud. She felt it a torture to be obliged to display herself to so many people. She wished to appear to him only. To him who was all the world to her.

Walpurga came, and gazed upon her like one entranced. There stood a maiden, so beautiful, so charming, so brilliantly and wonderfully encircled with reeds, and with diamond drops hanging from those reeds and from red coral branches. The girdle was a green serpent, with large glittering diamond eyes that sparkled so that it dazzled one's eyes to look at them. Her long hair was loosened, and fell down over her bare neck. It was held together at the top by a wreath of water-lilies glittering with dew drops, and on her brow was a star which flashed and sparkled, while the face of the beautiful maiden was more radiant than all her jewels. Irma had never before looked so beautiful. She seemed so noble, so far away, as if smiling, from the clouds above, upon mortals below.

"Dear me! Why, you're the Lady of the Lake," exclaimed Walpurga.

"Ah! So you recognize me," said Irma, holding out her hand. Her voice sounded strangely.

Walpurga pressed her hand to her heart. She felt grieved that Irma should assume this character. It was defying God, and would end in evil. But Walpurga said nothing; she merely folded her hands and moved her lips in silent prayer for Irma.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, after passing her hand across her eyes, "dear me, how the people can fix themselves up. Where do they get everything from? How is it possible?" She walked round and round Irma. "When I tell 'em at home, they'll never

believe I've seen anything like this. The Lady of the Lake wears an undergarment of sea foam and loose hair just like this. If only mother and Hansei were here."

Irma made no reply. She walked about the room, and when she saw herself reflected in the great mirrors her own figure seemed like a strange apparition, and the rustling of the reeds bewildered her.

"I would like to jump into the lake, just as I am, and quench the burning flames," thought she to herself.

Walpurga seemed dazzled by so much splendor and returned to her apartments.

"I can easily imagine," she said to herself, "that the people here do n't understand the world, and that the queen herself does n't understand it, either. They make a new world every day, and turn everything upside down and inside out, and disguise and mask themselves. How are they ever to get rest and keep their senses? The queen's right; it's better that I should go home again. I'd go crazy here."

When Walpurga reached her room, she found a letter from home awaiting her. She had been joyfully looking forward to this letter for weeks. She had fancied how delighted her mother and Hansei would be, and how the villagers would come and admire their new clothes, and express their astonishment. She had placed a cheerful letter in the breast-pocket of Hansei's jacket, and this was the answer. Stasi had written it, but the mother had dictated every word. It read thus:

"Oh, child, I'm sure you meant well enough, but it did n't turn out well. I and Hansei wore the beautiful clothes when we went to church on New Year's day. I did n't want to; I felt sure something would happen; but Hansei said we must put them on for the king would think ill of it, if we did n't wear the clothes he sent us, and so, for peace's sake, I went to church with him. But the people kept looking at us so strangely, and did n't say a word; and after church, they were standing together in crowds and we could hear them say, while they pointed their fingers at us: 'It's all very fine. Such things can be got at the capital, but every one knows how; not in an honest way, that's certain. The old fool and that blockhead there are proud of it in the bargain, and show off their new clothes.' Old Zenza was worse than any of them, and people who never listened to her at other times, were quite willing to hear all she had to say, and urged her to go on.

"Oh, my dear child! you do n't know how bad people can be. I know that you're good, but some people are bad and begrudge one everything, and what they can't take from you they befool. You meant well enough, I'm sure, but I won't even venture out of the house in my own clothes now. The people are so envious, so cunning and so willing to speak evil. As long as you're poor you

know nothing of it, but now I see it. And, dear child, that's not the worst of it. The worst of all is that they want to fill one's heart with mistrust, but I have none towards you; I know you're good. Remain so, and bear in mind, that if your heart is troubled you can't find rest, though you sleep in a golden bed and on pillows of silk. It were far better to lie on thorns or in the grave. The innkeeper came and offered to buy the clothes for himself and his wife, but I won't let him have them. And now, dear child, keep honest, and don't touch a thread or a penny to which any evil clings. I know you would n't do it, but I can't help telling you; and don't take it so much to heart that people are so bad, and I shan't either."

Walpurga cried bitterly while she read the letter. "The peasants are the worst people in the world," thought she. "Of course, there are bad people among the court folk, but they're not that bad. Just let one of 'em come again and ask for pardon. I'll send them home again." She felt like asking the king to have a sound thrashing administered to every one of the villagers. She only wished that the king's power could be hers for one short hour, so that she might show these silly, infamous people who really was their master.

CHAPTER VIII.

WALPURGA was sitting in her room, weeping with anger. Now and then she would clench her fists and speak her mind to the folks at home, in such a manner that they would have trembled with fear, if they could only have heard her. But she soon regained her self-control and repressed all emotion, lest the excitement occasioned by the wicked folk at home should injuriously affect the child.

Meanwhile, there were sounds of music far away in the brightly illuminated and elegant apartments of the palace, and also in the winter garden. There were thousands of lights, a perfect sea of velvets and silks, pearls and diamonds, flowers and wreaths, and smiling, joyous faces; but the king outshone them all.

He knew that he was handsome, and took an almost childlike delight in the fact. He was always in a good humor when attired in becoming uniform. At the great fêtes which were given on the various regimental anniversaries, he always wore the uniform of the regiment thus honored. He was best pleased with himself, when in the dress of the hussars, for that displayed his fine figure to great advantage. On this occasion, he appeared in the fantastic costume of the mythic king Artus, in a golden coat of mail and flowing purple mantle. At his side, was the queen, refined and delicate as a lily, and wearing a light, flowing white veil.

The king observed the pleased expression of all who beheld him.

He was happy, for he knew that their admiration was not flattery. When Irma first saw him and made her obeisance to the royal couple, he required all her self-command, to refrain from sinking on her knees at his feet. Then she looked up into his face, with a happy, beseeching air.

She could scarce refrain from expressing her admiration and devotion.

The queen greeted her cordially, and said :

"I am sorry, Irma, that you can't see yourself ; you 're enough to make one believe in miracles."

The king said nothing, but Irma felt his glance resting upon her. She could not conceive how it was that his glances and the queen's words did not destroy her. With an effort to regain her composure, she said :

"Ah, Your Majesty, I find my costume oppressive. A spirit should stay but a minute and then vanish in a burst of flame."

"There is a minute which is as eternity."

Irma had, indeed, felt a conscious pride in her beautiful appearance, but now she experienced a higher joy. He who was so tall and handsome, a knight more perfect than fancy could devise, could give the kiss of eternity ; for he alone, was the highest embodiment of the idea of royalty.

Irma scarcely noticed what was going on about her.

The royal couple passed on, and Irma, in spite of her splendid attire, felt as if deserted and forlorn. The king was no longer near her. In the distance she could still see him, radiant as a god.

Those who were near Irma, praised her ingenious and poetical costume. She did not hear a word of what was said. The queen sent for her. The king had wished the queen to open the ball with him, but she had declined. He always asked her, as a matter of form, but she never danced.

She now begged Irma to open the ball in her stead.

Irma bowed her thanks, but a proud feeling of superiority filled her breast. "You have nothing to give me. It is I who am giving. It is I who am renouncing. He is mine. The priest gave him to you ; nature has given him to me. You are a tender, delicate flower, but we are eagles, who soar into the clouds."

She could hardly conceive how she could bear it all. Every drop of blood in her veins had turned to fire.

The quadrille began.

Irma felt the king's warm breath against her cheek. He pressed her hand, indulged in various pleasantries, and remarked that it was charming to be able to indulge one's fancy in conjuring up a fantastic world. Irma felt that both she and the king would have liked to speak of far different things, and that, indeed, silence was even more eloquent than speech ; but they were obliged to talk, and of indifferent subjects at that. Whenever the king's hand

touched hers, she felt as if she must suddenly fly aloft with him; and, whenever he removed it, as if she must sink. They came near throwing the whole quadrille into confusion.

The queen left the ball at an early hour. The king accompanied her, but soon returned.

Irma went about the room, but the gay scene seemed like a confused dream. At last she met her brother and his wife, who were richly attired, and greeted them with a pleasant smile. She was for ever asking herself: "Do I still live? where am I? who am I?" She had descended through the air, and was floating in a strange world, in which there were only two human beings—he and she; the first, the only human pair. The gods have again descended upon earth, and his kiss is eternity.

She sat with her brother and his wife, in a bower under a pine tree. Presently, the king approached. In her heart, she rushed forth to embrace him, exclaiming: "Let us die together! Thou art mine and I am thine. We are alone in the world—" But all she did was to rise from her seat, and bow tremblingly. The king sat down beside her.

As if this were the first time he had beheld her, he gazed with delight upon her beautifully shaped head, the curls playing about her throat and descending to her shoulders, and the dimpled neck. She seemed taller than usual. The delicate, oval face; the broad forehead richly arched as if with too great a wealth of thought; the finely curved eyebrows; the brown eyes with their limpid brilliancy, and the swelling lips; all were in beautiful and harmonious proportion.

"You are beautiful, and I love you," whispered the king.

"And you are beautiful and great, and my love for you is without limit," answered her heart, although her lips did not utter a sound. She closed her eyes and suffered his glance to rest upon her.

"Irma!" said the king. "Irma," he repeated, with a choking voice.

They sat there in silence for some time, and then, drawing a deep breath, the king said:

"Oh, Irma! There is one moment which is as eternity—there parting is unknown. In the world below, men reckon by hours and minutes, but to those who dwell in the heaven above, the earth is no longer visible."

Irma looked up. Bruno and his wife had gone. She was alone with the king.

She longed to fall on her knees before him, to clasp him in her ardent embrace. With powerful effort, she forced herself to remember her surroundings. The music, the lights, the gay figures: all was a confused jumble. She opened her lips but could not utter a word. She arose quickly and with trembling step, left the room.

The king left the ball soon after.

It was late at night. Walpurga, her heart filled with sadness, stood looking out of the window of the room over Irma's apartments.

Light clouds were passing over the sky, now covering the moon, and then again revealing it in all its splendor. The light fell full on the figure of the Venus de Milo, and she seemed to turn her face.

Walpurga bounded away from the window, and was so frightened that she did not venture again to return to the open casement.

The same ray of moonlight that shone upon the Venus de Milo, rested tremblingly on the lips of the statue which the king had kissed. . . . The gods were astir that moonlight night. . . .

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN the small circle composed of the select of the court were at tea, the intendant announced it as his intention to celebrate the birthdays of those great minds who had contributed to the elevation of the drama, and said that he meant to begin with the approaching anniversary of Lessing's birth.

"What play will you give us?" enquired the queen.

"I should feel highly honored if Your Majesty would decide which it shall be."

"I?" asked the queen, looking towards the king, who was sitting opposite to her. Although apparently engaged with an illustrated newspaper, he must have felt that the queen's eye was upon him, for he looked up and said:

"Yes, please yourself."

"Then I should like 'Emilia Galotti.'"

All looked up, for this work, as well as Schiller's "Love and Intrigue" had, during the last reign, been placed on the list of forbidden plays.

A pause ensued. It was the king's turn to speak, and what would he say?

He remained silent. A moment later, he showed Schnabelsdorf, who was sitting near him, a portrait of a foreign scholar who had recently died, and asked whether it was a good likeness.

Schnabelsdorf replied affirmatively.

The king's voice seemed so harsh and strange that the queen felt greatly alarmed.

At that moment, Baum was about to hand a cup to the queen. She turned quickly, with a frightened look, just as if a cat had sprung upon her shoulders, and, while turning, struck against the proffered cup, which fell to the floor. If a bomb had suddenly burst, it could not have produced greater consternation. Baum picked up the fragments, and felt so terribly unhappy, that he

would gladly have prostrated himself; but it would not do for him to speak or even ask pardon, for that would have been a still more heinous breach of discipline. The queen turned towards him and said:

"It was my fault, not yours."

She requested the ladies who had hurriedly left their seats, in order to satisfy their curiosity and rectify the damage that had been done, to be seated again. The lord steward beckoned Baum to approach, and whispered him to withdraw and leave the rest to the other servants.

It required all the queen's power of self-command to preserve the appearance of unconcern which etiquette demanded. Although her brain whirled with contending emotions, she sat erect and smiling, while her eyes followed the servant who was carrying away the broken fragments, just as if he were bearing with him something else which had been shattered forever.

Baum went out to the landing, and stood by the stair-rail. He felt as if stunned, and was so ashamed of himself that he would gladly have hurled himself down to the floor below. Such a thing had never happened to him before. It would disgrace him for life, and, although the queen had taken the blame upon herself, he would have to suffer for it all the same. He looked at the fragments of the cup, and only wished that he, too, had been dashed into pieces.

Order was speedily restored. Schnabelsdorf, who, in the new ministry, held the position of foreign secretary and temporarily conducted the department of education, proved himself a friend in need. With consummate tact, he succeeded in engaging the company with subjects that interested them, and thus restored their good humor. Taking the play of Emilia Galotti, as an instance, he said that the names which poets had assigned to their *dramatis personæ* would furnish the subject of interesting investigations, or rather hypotheses. It was his opinion that in naming his intrigant Marinelli, Lessing had intended an allusion to Machiavelli, to whose character the last century had not been able to do justice. The vowels were the same in both names; and the name of Orsina reminded one of a dagger leaping from its sheath. The full round O followed by the sharp I. He continued in this vein, and afforded much interesting information in regard to the names of poetic characters. Lessing had acted wisely, substituting for the name of Melchisedek—Boccaccio's Jew—that of Nathan, for the very name reminds one of an all-embracing garment. How appropriate are the names which Goethe has given his female characters—Gretchen, Clärchen, Dorothea, Natalie. Even Schiller had frequently been happy in his choice of names, as, for instance, Franz Mohr—Posa—how sonorous are the O and the A.

Schnabelsdorf's conversation was both fluent and pleasing.

How fortunate it is to be so well informed, and to be able to impart one's knowledge to others, without troubling one's self about moods, broken cups, or ill-humored people looking at illustrated papers.

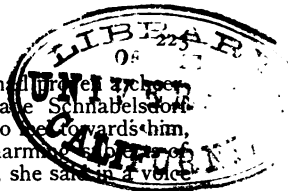
As no one seemed inclined to assist Schnabelsdorf, he was obliged to monopolize the conversation. At last Irma took pity on him and carelessly remarked how strange it was, that no proper names were invented in our day, and that all we could do was to borrow, combine, or abbreviate those which already existed.

This suggested various unsuccessful, but mirth-provoking, attempts to invent new names.

The intendant told them of a peasant whom he knew and who had named the first of his daughters Prima, the second Secunda, the third Tertia, and so on.

The king scarcely ever looked up from the illustrated papers that lay before him, but the queen was affable and kindly towards all who took part in the conversation. She felt grateful to every one who spoke, for something had happened to her which she had really not desired. She was, even now, as ignorant of the false construction which might be put upon her motive in selecting Emilia Galotti, as she was of having intended to break the cup. It was evident that the king's mind was agitated, for he frequently passed his hand over his brows as if to smooth them, and it was his wont to indulge in this movement whenever he felt it necessary to repress his excitement. His first thought had been: Is she really ignorant that the play has, for many years, been a forbidden one? Perhaps she is, for those who measure life by their own feelings have no sense for historic data. But suddenly a thought occurred to him—and he again stroked his eyebrows—it is an intrigue, and she is capable of it. She means to lay a trap *à la* Hamlet, in order to see what effect the play will have upon us. But no, thought he to himself, in that case, she would be obliged to surprise us, and that's not her way. But anger and violence and a rebuking conscience struggled within him. His persistent devotion to the illustrated journals made it seem as if, while in the midst of the company, he had withdrawn into a private box. The king had never before, while in his private circle, read so uninterruptedly. It had been his wont to look now at this, and now at another picture, and to hand it to others for notice or comparison. But, on this evening, he read and yet knew not what he read. He would gladly have caught Irma's eye, and felt happy when he heard her expressing herself so unconstrainedly. He admired her, and would gladly have looked round to her, but dared not even smile approval of her words. He had left Schnabelsdorf's remarks unanswered, and must, therefore, seem not to have heard Irma's.

The queen arose, All stood up with a sense of relief, for every



one had felt oppressed, although the evening had been a cheerful one. Before withdrawing, the queen made Schnabelsdorf happy by telling him how grateful they ought to be towards him, since he was always able to introduce such charming subjects of conversation. Then, addressing the intendant, she said in a voice louder than was her wont :

"If it is any trouble to study Emilia Galotti—"

"Oh, no, Your Majesty."

"I mean if the time's too short."

"There's ample time," replied the intendant. He had already determined how he would cast the play and intended to try the novel experiment of using the costume of the last century.

"I think," said the queen, while her voice assumed an expression which was foreign to it, "that you might give us 'Nathan the Wise' or 'Minna von Barnhelm,' if you think they can be produced more effectively."

"Let it be as it is," exclaimed the king, suddenly. "Let Emilia Galotti be the play, and have the bills read : 'By royal command.'"

The king offered his arm to the queen and, accompanied by her, withdrew. The rest of the company bowed low and soon afterwards separated for the night. Those who lived without the palace got into their carriages ; the rest retired to their apartments, and, although indifferent and unimportant topics had but recently engaged them, every one was busied with his own thoughts on one and the same subject.

Irma dismissed her maid as soon as possible ; then, taking up a dust-covered volume of Lessing, she opened and closed the book several times in order to shake off the dust and, at one sitting, read the whole of Emilia Galotti.

She did not fall asleep until near morning, and, when she awoke, hardly knew where she was. The open book still lay before her ; the lights had gone out of themselves, for she had forgotten to put them out, and the air in her apartment was close and almost stifling.

At about the same time that Irma awoke, bitter tears were being shed in the theatre. The intendant had assigned Emilia Galotti to a new cast, had taken the rôle of Emilia from the leading actress, who had looked upon the part as hers in perpetuity, and had given it to a more youthful performer. The rôle of Claudia had been assigned to the elder actress, who sat weeping behind a side scene, exclaiming : "Pearls mean tears, but tears do not mean pearls." The intendant, although generally kind and amiable, was unrelenting.

But Baum was far more unhappy than the dissatisfied actress. For she was still permitted to take part in the performance, while he, on account of the mishap with the cup, was no longer allowed to remain near their majesties. He deplored his misfortune to Walpurga, and she begged the queen that Baum might again be re-

stored to favor. On the second evening, the queen enquired if the lackey Baum was ill. He was saved. Full of gratitude, he went to Walpurga and said :

"I 'll never forget you for this: you 've served me for life."

"I 'm glad I 've been able, for once, to do you a favor."

"I 'll repay you some time or other, depend upon it."

Baum hurriedly withdrew, for Irma entered the room. The king came in soon afterward. He was about to speak French with Irma, but she begged him not to do so, saying :

"Simplicity is very susceptible."

"And so-called good-nature," replied the king, "is often full of malice and intrigue. Weakness all at once fancies itself obliged to be very strong."

"We must be gentle for all that," replied Irma. Although they had spoken German before Walpurga, she had not understood a word of what they said.

"I admire the power of my spy," said the king, "and confess that I bow to her, in all humility. I would never have believed such greatness possible."

Irma nodded gently, and replied: "The hero is Hettore Gonzaga, but the true Emilia Galotti loves him with a power which is worthy of him."

"And the true Hettore is neither dilettante nor weakling, and needs no Marinelli."

The relation born of shame and passion, received added strength through the cunning and intriguing opposition of the queen, for the choice of the proscribed play was regarded as part of a well-considered plan. It was like a breath of wind, which, instead of extinguishing the flame, fans it. Deep within their hearts, lurked the self-extenuating plea that the queen was not the pure angel she pretended to be.

"I am firmly convinced," said the king, "that Hippocrates conjured the fatal crystal cup into Nausikaa's hand."

"No, Your Majesty," replied Irma, eagerly, "Hippocrates is a thoroughly noble man; somewhat of a pedant, indeed, but too good and too wise to do anything like that."

The king soon left and, after he had gone, Walpurga said :

"Now, Countess, you might open every vein in my body and I could n't repeat one word of what you 've been saying. I do n't understand a word of it."

"Yes, Walpurga," said Irma, "the king's a very learned man, and we have just been talking about a book which was read yesterday."

Walpurga was satisfied.

"I had expected to meet the queen here," said Irma, after awhile, passing her hand over her face, as if to change its expression.

"The queen is n't coming to-day," replied Walpurga. "She sent word that she is n't very well. At other times, she never misses being here when we bathe the child, and there's nothing more beautiful either, than such a child in its bath, or right after the bath. It's like a new-born babe, and splashes and shouts and crows. Won't you stop and see it for once? It's a real treat."

Irma declined and soon afterward left the room.

Silent and alone, the queen lay in her room. Her heart still trembled with fear of the consequences of what she had done; no, of what had happened without her having really desired it. A dagger had been forced into her hand, as if by invisible fate. She could not, dared not use it; and yet suspicion filled her soul. Suspicion! The word suddenly seemed as if she had never heard it before, just as she had in truth never felt what it meant. Purity and innocence no longer exist. Every joyful word, every cheerful expression, every smile is equivocal. Every harmless remark has a new meaning. It were better to die than cherish suspicion. The blessed gift of fancy which enables its possessor faithfully to realize to himself, and sympathize with, the actions and thoughts of others, now became a consuming flame. Spectres appeared before her waking eyes and would not be laid. If the dread truth were only determined. One can take his position against a manifest wrong, but against suspicion there is none. It renders one weak and unsteady; nothing is fixed; the very earth under one's feet seems to tremble.

The queen was not ill. She could easily enough have gone to the apartments of her son; but she could not have looked into his face and smiled—for her heart was filled with a bitter thought against the father.

She arose quickly, and was about to send for the king. She would tell him all. She wished him to release her from the torment of suspicion. She would believe him. She would only ask him honestly to acknowledge whether he was still true and at one with her. "At heart he's frank and truthful," said she to herself, and love for her husband welled up from the depths of her heart. Still, if he has but swerved from himself, he has already been untrue; and would he acknowledge it? Can one expect a man to answer on his conscience, when he has already denied that conscience? And if he were to acknowledge the horrible fact, she would still bear it in silence. Anything was better than this suspicion that poisoned her heart and hardened her soul. Could it be that evil, nay, the mere suspicion of evil, destroys everything that lies within its reach?

She sat down again; she could not ask the king.

"Be it so," said she at last; "I must overcome this temptation, and the spirit of truth will lend me strength."

She thought for a moment of making Gunther her confidant. He was her fatherly friend. "But no," she exclaimed to herself, "I am not weak. I will not seek help from others. If I must learn the terrible truth, I will do it by myself; and if it is a delusion, I mean to conquer it unaided."

At table and in the social circle, the queen's behavior toward the king and Irma was more loving than ever. When she looked at her friend, she felt as if she ought to ask forgiveness for having, even for a moment, thought basely of her; but when she was alone she felt her soul carried away towards him and her. She longed to know what they were thinking of, what they were doing or saying.—They were speaking of her, smiling at and ridiculing her. Who knows? perhaps wishing her dead.

She, indeed, wished that she were dead.

CHAPTER X.

"I'M going to the theatre this evening," said Baum to Walpurga, in the afternoon of the 22d of January. "They're going to play a great piece. What a pity you can't go, too."

"I've seen enough of masquerading," replied Walpurga. "I shall stay with my child. He's the only one in the whole court who can't disguise himself."

Every seat in the court theatre was occupied long before the beginning of the play, and the lively talking among the audience seemed like the roar of the sea. Many wondered at the words on the play bill:

"In Commemoration of Lessing's Birthday

EMILIA GALOTTI

BY ROYAL COMMAND."

They spoke in hints, but understood each other perfectly. Was the performance intended to refute certain rumors? Would the court attend, and who would form the suite?

Three dull knocks were heard. They were the signal that the court had entered the passage leading from the palace to the theatre. Every eye, every opera glass was directed to the royal box.

The queen entered, radiant with youthful beauty. The nobles who occupied the first tier arose. She bowed graciously, and then sat down, and attentively read the play-bill that was fastened to the front of the box. The king entered soon after and took the seat beside her. He, too, saluted the nobles who were still standing, and who seated themselves at the same time he did, just as if they were part of himself.

The king reached back for his lorgnette, which was handed to him, and surveyed the audience, while the orchestra played the overture. Irma's wish was realized. Since the new intendant had come into power, there was music at the beginning of the play and during the *entr'actes*.

"Who's sitting behind the queen?"

"Countess von Wildenort."

She wore a single rose in her brown hair. She was exchanging a few complimentary remarks with Colonel Bronnen, and was smiling and showing her pearly teeth.

A young critic in the pit said to his neighbor:

"It is surely not without design that Countess Wildenort, like Emilia Galotti, wears only a single rose in her hair."

There was so much talking during the overture, that those who desired to listen to the music frequently hissed, but without avail; for it was not until the curtain rose that the audience became silent.

It is not until near the end of the first act of the play that there is any occasion for marked applause. The prince's haste and prejudice are shown in his readiness to sign the death-warrant, while the carriage waits for him. Old privy councilor Rota withdraws the document.

In order to mark the festal character of the evening's performance, the intendant had selected music by celebrated composers, for the *entr'actes*. The malicious maintained that this was only done in order to prevent discussion of the play, which had not been performed for many years. If this had really been the intention, the lively conversation, both in the royal box and among the rest of the audience, prevented its success.

In reply to a remark of the king's, the intendant said:

"The rôle of Rota, although insignificant, is quite a graceful one, and, in this, Lessing has proved himself the master. Another advantage is that the part can be played by a veteran."

The queen looked around in surprise—was this mere acting, instead of a living, thrilling fact?

They went on with the play. The scene between Appiani and Marinelli aroused tumultuous applause. The queen never once left her place, although it was her wont between the acts to retire to the *salon* near her box; and Irma, as first maid of honor, was obliged to remain in attendance.

Between the third and fourth acts, the lord steward met Bronnen in the corridor and said: "If they would only get through with this confounded, democratic play. The sweet rabble down there may become demonstrative." The next act was the fourth, containing the scene between Orsina and Marinelli. The queen held her fan with a convulsive grasp. She saw and heard all that passed on the stage, while, with strained attention, she listened to the quickened breathing of Irma, who stood behind her. She longed to turn round suddenly and look into her face, but did not venture to do so. With one and the same glance, she saw the figures on the stage and watched her husband's countenance. Her eyes and ears did double service. It was all she could do to control herself. The play went on. Orsina and Odoardo—if Irma

were now to faint—What then? What had she done in having this piece performed?—Orsina hands the dagger to her father, and at last rises into a frenzy of fury. “If we, all of us,” she cried, “this whole host of forsaken ones, were transformed into bacchantes and furies, with him in our possession, and were tearing him to pieces and rending the flesh from his limbs—yea, tearing out his vitals in order to find the heart which the traitor promised to each and yet gave to none! Ah, what a dance that would be! That would—”

If Irma should cry out!—The queen clutched the rail of the box with convulsive grasp. She felt as if she, herself, must cry out to the audience.

But all was as silent as before.

When the scene was over, the king, addressing Irma, in a careless tone, said: “Müller plays excellently, does she not?”

“Wonderfully, Your Majesty, although some parts were overacted. The passage, ‘I have nothing to pardon, because I have not been offended,’ she gave in too sharp a tone, and her voice seemed unnatural. The sentences of one who had been thus openly humiliated should be more like dagger thrusts; the words should prepare us for the sharp point of the dagger that follows them.”

Irma’s voice was firm and clear. The queen fanned herself, in order to cool her burning face and prevent herself from betraying her agitation.

One whose conscience reproved her could not have spoken thus. Her voice must have faltered and the terrible lesson of the play itself must have petrified her, thought the queen, as she turned towards Irma and nodded pleasantly.

I am stronger than I imagined, thought Irma to herself, smoothing her gloves. While she heard Odoardo’s words, a mist had arisen before her eyes. If it had been her father—and it might have been he. A cry arose from her heart, but did not pass her lips; and now she was quiet and self-composed. The play progressed without interruption, and, when it was over, the audience were not content until they had twice called the Odoardo of the evening before the curtain. The king joined in the applause.

The court party returned to the palace, and retired to the queen’s apartments for tea.

The queen was cheerful, as if she had just escaped from some danger. For the first time in a long while her bearing was easy and vivacious. A dread load had been lifted from her heart. She was now free and vowed that she would never more think basely of any one; and, least of all, of her neighbor.

They were at tea, and the queen asked her husband: “And had you also never seen the play before?”

“Oh, yes. I saw it on my travels; I forget where it was.”

Turning towards the intendant, he added: "I think that the costume of the last century was very appropriate. When I saw the play before, it was in modern attire, which seemed quite out of place. In spite of its classic character, the play has a thin crust of powder which one dare not blow away, lest the whole, both scene and action, become unnatural."

The intendant was delighted.

"How do you like the piece?" asked the king of Gunther.

"Your Majesty, it is one of our classics."

"You're not always so orthodox."

"Nor am I in this case," replied Gunther; "I can safely say that I honor Lessing with all my heart and perhaps, indeed, with undue partiality. But in this play, Lessing had not yet arrived at the repose of freedom. It is the result of noblest melancholy, and might be termed fragmentary and incomplete; for the account is not closed, and at the end there still remains an unfilled breach. This, however, arises from the fact that a great historical subject taken from the age of the Romans has been transferred to the cabinet and country-seat of a petty Italian prince."

"How do you mean?" enquired the king. Gunther went on to explain:

"In this play, there is a pathos of despair which reaches its climax in the final question: 'Is it not enough that princes are men? Must they also learn that their friends are demons in disguise?' One might assume that this discovery was a punishment that would cling to the prince for life. Henceforth, he must become a changed man. But this epigrammatic confession of his own weakness and of the baseness of those who environ him, does not seem to me a full expiation. A question, and such as this, at the close of of a drama whose aim should be to leave us reconciled with eternal and unchanging law, can only be explained by the fact that the keynote of the whole play is sarcastic. He whom certain things will not deprive of his reason, has none to lose. The fault of the play—Lessing's love of truth would court the boldest investigation—the gap, as it were, lay in the fact that Lessing has transferred the act of Virginius from the Roman forum to the modern stage and has given us, instead of the infuriated citizen with knife in hand, the malcontent Colonel Galotti. The act of Virginius was the turning point that led to a great political catastrophe, after which came revolution and expiation. But in Lessing's play, the deed takes place at the end, and leads to no results. It closes with a question, as it were, or rather with an unresolved dissonance."

Although this explanation had, at first, been given in a somewhat acrimonious tone, it gave great satisfaction. It elevated the subject, and the painful impressions awakened by it, into the cool serene atmosphere of criticism.

"What struck me as peculiar, in the play," said Irma, unable to

remain silent, "was that I discovered two marriage stories in it."

"Marriage stories? and two of them?"

"Certainly. Emilia is the offspring of an unfortunate, or, to speak plainly, a bad marriage. Odoardo, with his rude virtue, and Claudia, so yielding, led each other a terrible life and, in the end, parted without scandal. He remained on his estate, while she took the daughter to the city, in order that she might there receive the finishing touches. Emilia was obliged to devote much of her time to the piano. Papa Appiani was, in a moral sense, always on stilts. Madame Claudia was worldly minded and fond of society. The fruit of this marriage was Emilia, and her marriage with Appiani would have been just like that of her parents."

"Cleverly expounded," said the king, and, encouraged by his praise, Irma continued:

"Emilia's grandmother may have said: 'I am unhappy, but I would like my daughter Claudia to be happy with good Odoardo,' who was then but a captain. And in turn, mother Claudia said: 'I am not happy, but my daughter shall be;' and, at a later day, Emilia would have said: 'I am not happy, but my daughter, etc., etc.' It's an everlasting round of misery and resignation. Who is this Mr. Appiani? A splenetic counselor to the embassy, who is out of employ, and merely marries for the sake of the worthy man whom he thus makes his father-in-law, and who, after marriage, would preach to his wife just as Odoardo had done before him, and with just as much effect. Appiani was worth a charge of powder, or even two, as Marinelli thought. Why had he no eye for the toilette of his betrothed? The very next winter, Emilia would have died of *ennui* in the country, or, becoming transformed in spirit, would have founded an infant school on her estate. If Emilia could sing, her melodies would have been like those of Mozart's Zerlina. Masetto Appiani felt that he would not suit, and, although he could not tell why, had good reasons for feeling so sad before the betrothal. Appiani ought to have married a widow with seven children. The man's heart was tender by nature. Had he quarrelled with his wife, he would have said, as he did after his dispute with Marinelli: 'Ah, that did me good. It stirred up my blood and now I feel like a new and better man.' Emilia loves the prince and, therefore, fears him. He who becomes her husband by virtue of the marriage contract, has never possessed her love. I would have chosen Appiani for a parliamentary delegate, but not for a husband. Such a man should either remain unmarried, or else take unto himself a wife who founds soup-kitchens; not an Emilia, who is enough of a coquette to know what becomes her."

Irma's cheeks glowed while she thus spoke. She felt as if riding o'er forest and field on a wild courser. She had begun in bitterness and, yielding to imagination, she went on boldly and fear-

lessly. She had lost all fear and felt a conscious pride in her sway over life itself and all that surrounded her.

The evening which had threatened dire storms had brought refreshing breezes and a purified atmosphere.

The queen breathed freely once more, and felt happy in the midst of this circle of good and gifted people.

Immediately after the play, Baum had hurried to Walpurga and told her: "Oh, what a play we've had. I wonder they allow them to play anything so free. There's a prince who's just about to marry a princess, and has an old love who's still good-looking. He wants to get rid of her and, in the meanwhile, tries to procure a new one who is very beautiful and whose marriage is to take place that very day. He has a chamberlain who is his friend, but whom he treats quite roughly if he does not bring him what he wants on the instant. He treats him as an inferior and calls him a fool one moment, and embraces him the next. So the chamberlain manages to have the bridegroom shot dead and the bride carried away. But, all at once, the old love comes and meets the father of Emilia Galotti and sets him on, and the father stabs his daughter, and she drops down dead."

"And what becomes of the prince and the chamberlain?" asked Walpurga.

"I do not know."

"Tell me once more," said Walpurga; "what was the bride's name?"

"There's the play bill. It's all there."

Walpurga read the bill; the hand with which she held it trembled. There were names which the king and Irma had mentioned that day, when she had not understood a word of what they were saying.

"And so you've had that story performed. Oh you—The whole pack of you are—I know—"

Mademoiselle Kramer's advice stood her in good stead. Walpurga did not venture to utter the thoughts that filled her mind.

On the following evening, there was a court concert. The large hall in the main building was crowded with men wearing gay uniforms and crosses of various orders, and richly dressed ladies. The select court circle were in the hall, and the guests in the adjoining apartments and galleries.

Those who belonged to the queen's small circle, and who had been together yesterday, greeted each other with a familiar air. They did not keep together to-day. It was their duty to mingle with those guests who were less frequently invited. The king was attired in the uniform of the hussars and was in a happy mood. During the pauses, he would walk through the rooms, speaking to this one and that, and would have a pleasant word for every one. The queen looked as if suffering, and it was evident that it cost her an effort to keep up.

It was Irma's habit to enter into cheerful conversation with the singers, who were always seated on a raised platform separated from the rest of the room. The malicious asserted that she did this, in order to make a parade of her affability; but Irma simply believed it her duty to be kind and affable to the artists.

Doctor Gunther was engaged in conversation with the director of the academy and intendant Schoning. They were discussing designs for paintings to decorate the new parliament house, which had recently been completed by the king's orders. The artist regretted that there was no accepted symbol of the constitution. The conventional antique female figure holding a sheet of paper, was always cold and unsatisfactory.

"You re-awaken an old thought," replied the intendant. "What we lack is the myth-creating power and, if you will allow the expression in this case, the court-directing power. Just as there is a field marshal, so should there be a court director who—I mean it seriously—should always have precedence in all affairs of importance, and, at court, should always represent the constitution. Believe me, the constitution is not admitted at court. What I mean is, it is not represented and is, therefore, unknown there. Do you not agree with me, privy councilor Gunther?"

Gunther, rousing himself from a reverie, answered: "There's no longer any use in trying to find myths and symbols to represent things which have been weighed and measured and of which we have distinct conceptions. It would be just as unsuccessful as an attempt to represent the goddess of reason."

He spoke in an absent manner, for he was constantly watching Irma. She was about to return to the company, when he advanced towards her. She said: "Ah, nowadays everything is according to programme. In olden times, the king sent for a bard with his harp, and the old man, with his white beard, sang wondrous songs. But now, nothing less than an orchestra and a dozen singers will do, and one has the musical bill of fare in his hand."

Gunther did not seem disposed to enter upon the subject, and replied:

"I've been thinking seriously about what you said yesterday."

"I never think about what was said yesterday."

"But I'm a pedant and can't help it. You're right. Emilia would never have been happy with Appiani."

"I'm glad that you agree with me."

"Do you think that Emilia would have been happy with the prince?"

"Yes."

"And for how long?"

"That I do n't know."

"She would soon have been undeceived, for this prince is only a selfish voluptuary, one who steals sweets in love and in life; in a

word, a dilettante. As long as a dilettante is young, the grace which is inseparable from the vigor and elasticity of youth, lend him what is called an interesting air. But when he becomes older he copies himself, repeats the few phrases which he has heard from others or has, perhaps, blundered together for himself, and, as if disguising his soul with rouge, affects the possession of youthful enthusiasm. Beneath the surface, all is withered, empty, decayed and fragile. It is not without reason that Lessing depicted Hettore as young and handsome, and on the eve of consummating a lawful marriage. He is ready to make Appiani ambassador to his father. Are you not of my opinion?" asked Gunther at last. He noticed that Irma seemed unwilling to answer.

"Oh, excuse me," said she; "I've drunk so deeply of the music of to-day that I've no memory left for the dry affairs of yesterday."

She took leave of him with a pleasant smile and disappeared in the throng.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHOUGH its advent had been preceded by much gaiety and merriment, there were quiet times at court during the carnival season.

The queen was ill.

The excitement of the last few weeks had greatly impaired her strength, and it was feared that her life was in danger.

Irma now spent most of her time in the queen's apartments, and when, at rare intervals, she visited Walpurga, looked pale and worn.

Walpurga still kept on spinning, and the child thrived amazingly.

"Oh, how true were our good queen's words! 'God be praised, my child!' said she to the prince, one day, 'that you're healthy and away from me. You live for yourself, alone.' Yes, she's looked deep into every one's heart, and I think she's too good for this world. Mother's said, a thousand times, that the Lord soon calls those who are always good, and who never get downright angry and furious. Oh, if I could only take my prince home with me! Spring'll soon be here. Oh God! if he were to lose his mother and me too!"

Thus did Walpurga express herself to Mademoiselle Kramer, who found it no easy matter to console her.

Baum so managed it that there was always something for him to do in the crown prince's apartments. He was no longer importunate, but simply grateful and obliging, in his attentions to Walpurga. He was determined to gain her sympathy, for that was worth more to him than aught else. And now when Walpurga confided her trouble to him, he said:

"Do I wish you well?"

"Yes, I can't deny that you do," replied Walpurga.

"Then listen to what I've got to tell you. There's nothing more tiresome, or niggardly, than a good, simple marriage; that is, what they call a 'good marriage'. What does one get by it? Wages, a tip, once in a while, from a stranger, or a few bottles of wine which one can make away with. In Baroness Steigeneck's time, it was quite different, for then the valets de chambre and every one about the place grew rich, and had houses in the town, and owned mortgages and estates. But now, thank God, it'll soon be different again."

"I do n't know what you mean," said Walpurga.

"I wish I were in your place, only for one hour," replied Baum. "She thinks more of you than she does of any one. It was here that they came to an understanding, and, if you've a mind to, you can get all the money you want, and woods and fields and meadows besides. All I ask for, is the place of steward at the summer palace."

"And how am I to do all that?"

"Oh you—" laughed Baum. "Have n't you noticed anything? Have n't you eyes in your head? If the queen dies, the king will marry your Countess. She's a free countess, and can marry any king; and if the queen does n't die, it won't matter much anyhow."

"I'd like to box your ears for saying such a thing; and the next minute you'll be cringing and bowing to them. How can you say such a thing?"

"But if it's true?"

"But it is n't true."

"But if it were true, for all?"

"It can't be true."

"But I tell you it is."

"And even if it were— But, forgive me, good Countess! I don't believe a word of it, it's only he that says it.—If it were true, I'd rather die than ask for the wages of sin. You're a good-for-nothing fellow, and if you ever say such a thing again, I'll tell on you. Take my word for it, I will."

Baum pretended that it was all a joke. But Walpurga could see no joke in the matter, and he was glad when she, at last, promised to say nothing about it. He remarked that he required no mediator and would manage to look out for himself.

In Countess Irma's apartment, which was just below that of the crown prince and Walpurga, a scene of quite a different nature was going on.

Bruno was there, and thus addressed Irma:

"I'm in trouble, and I can't help saying that it's your fault. Mother Sylph has inflicted herself upon me, and is very much in my way."

"Whom do you mean?"

"My mother-in-law has come and has told me with a smile, that as long as my sister—she, too, might just as well be here."

Irma covered her face with both her hands.

"And do you, too, believe it?"

"What matters it what I believe? It's the town-talk, and that's enough."

"It is n't enough; I shall teach them to talk differently."

"Very well. Go into every house, to every man and every woman, and tell them to think differently. But there's one thing you can do. Shall I tell you what it is?"

Irma nodded a silent assent.

"I know that the intendant sued for your hand last summer. He would feel it an honor to be able to call you his wife. Make up your mind to accept him."

A servant entered and announced the intendant.

"What a strange coincidence! Make up your mind at once."

The intendant entered. Bruno greeted him most cordially, and Irma's welcome was a friendly one.

Bruno soon took his leave. The intendant handed Irma a manuscript play and requested her to read it and give him her opinion of it. She accepted it with thanks, and laid it on a table.

"Ah, when spring returns, I shall not care to hear the theatre mentioned. Our theatre is a winter plant."

"This piece is intended for next winter."

"I can't tell you how I long for summer. When everything is barren and desolate as at present, one can hardly realize that there ever were sunshine and green trees and sparkling seas. Do you remember the balmy day last summer, when we met on the lake?"

"I do, indeed; very well."

A long pause ensued. Irma waited for the intendant to speak, but he remained silent. Not a sound was heard but that made by the parrot hopping about in its cage and pecking at the golden wires.

"I long," said Irma, "to visit my friend Emma next summer. I would like to revel in solitude. This winter has been too noisy and exciting."

"Yes, and, besides that, the queen's illness."

The parrot tugged at the golden wires, and Irma slightly loosened the red velvet ribbon on her morning dress.

"Do you intend to visit the lake again?" said Irma, trembling.

"No, dear Countess; I shall visit the various theatres of Germany, in order to engage a second basso and, above all, a young person for the lover's parts. You would hardly believe how scarce youthful lovers have become in the German world."

Irma laughed heartily, while the blood mounted to her temples. She felt quite faint.

The servant announced Baroness Steigeneck.

"I'm not at home," was Irma's hurried reply. "Pray remain a moment longer," said she, addressing the intendant.

He remained for some time longer, and referred to the manuscript, mentioning that the passages to be omitted were marked with a red pencil. Irma promised to read the play, thanked him for the compliment paid her judgment, and conversed in a light and careless tone, until he had left the room. As soon as he had gone, she threw herself on a sofa, where she lay for a long while, weeping bitterly. At last, she looked up, as if bewildered, for she thought she had heard a voice saying: "You meant to—Is there no other course left? Must one who has swerved from the straight path, necessarily sink into the mire of self-abasement?"

Suddenly, she arose, shook her head defiantly and brushed the hair from her face. She ordered her carriage, intending to drive to the sculptor's atelier and resume her work. The servant announced Colonel von Bronnen. "Let him enter," said Irma. A moment later, Irma was apologizing for receiving him in her hat. She was just about to drive out.

"I can call again, dear Countess, and will only leave the messages I have for you."

"Messages?"

"Yes, from your father."

"From my father? Where did you meet him?"

"At Wildenort."

"Were you there?"

"Yes, I had some matters to attend to in the neighborhood, and, without further introduction, called on your father. I felt that I had a right to call myself an intimate friend of yours."

"And how fares it with my father?"

"As it should with the father of such a daughter."

"Of such a daughter—"

"Pardon me, dearest Countess. You are in a hurry, and I am still so impressed by your father's great and noble nature, that I would rather we were both calm—"

"I am quite calm now; pray tell me, have you a message for me?"

"I have not. But it seems to me, dear Countess, as if I were just beginning to understand you.—O, what a man your father is!"

Irma looked up in surprise. She thought of Appiani speaking to Odoardo.

The Colonel continued, calmly:

"Dear Countess, I am not an enthusiastic youth; but, during the short time I was permitted to spend with your father, I felt as if the exalted existence which had once been my ideal had become a real, living fact. Such perfect communions are impossible unless one feels sure that he is looked upon with favor, and I feel that I have had the good fortune to gain your father's good opinion."

"You fully deserve it. Excuse me, while I lay off my hat. Pray take a seat and tell me more about father." She removed her hat; her excitement had only added to her beauty.

She rang for a servant and ordered him to send the carriage away.

The Colonel seated himself.

Irma was all attention. "Now tell me all," said she, brushing back her curls.

"You, of all others, will understand me, when I say that I passed sublime hours with your father. And yet I can recount nothing definite in regard to them. If, while rambling through the woods, I pluck a spray and fasten it to my hat, what can the spray tell of the rustling of the forest, or of the free mountain air? It is merely a symbol, both for us and to those we meet, of the joy that pervades our whole being."

"I understand you," said Irma. They sat opposite each other, and neither of them spoke for some time.

"Did my father mention my brother?"

"No. The word 'son' never passed his lips. Oh, Countess! the man to whom pure love vouchsafes the happiness of becoming a son—"

Emotion seemed to choke his utterance. Irma trembled; her heart beat quickly. Here was a man, noble and highly esteemed, who offered her his heart and hand. Yea, his heart, and she had none to give him in return. She felt a pang that pierced her very soul.

"I feel happy," said she, "that father, in his solitude, has once more seen that this stirring, bustling court contains some worthy men; men like yourself, who stand for that which is best in all things. Do not, I beg of you, reject my honest praise. I know that true merit is always modest, because it is never satisfied with itself."

"Your father expressed the same thought, in the very same words."

"I believe he must have taught it to me; if not in words, at all events by his example. I would have liked to see you and him together. Your presence must have restored his faith in humanity. You are a messenger of goodness, and since you are good, you believe in the virtue of others."

"Where I have once felt respect and love," replied Bronnen, "I am unchangeable. I should like to write to your father at an early day. I should love, dear Countess, to send him the best of news, and in the best words that language affords. Countess Irma, I long to tell him—"

"My dear friend," interposed Irma, "I am, like my father, of a solitary nature. I thank you. You do not know how greatly your visit and all that you have told me, has benefited me. I thank

you with all my heart. Let us remain friends. Give me your hand as a pledge. Let us remain friends, just as we have been. I thank you—”

Her voice was choked with tears.

The Colonel took his leave. Irma was alone. She lay kneeling near the sofa. Her heart was filled with unutterable sorrow. The coxcomb had rejected her. Then came a man worthy of the best of wives. He loved and trusted her, and she had refused him. His kind and honest heart had a right to ask for full, unbounded love.

She shook off the mingled feeling of distress and mortification. The thought that she had acted honorably, soothed her and seemed like refreshing dew to her whirling brain. But then, again, it galled her when she asked herself: “How far have you sunk, that you are obliged to make a show of simple honesty? And where lives the girl who, if not bound by love, has a right to reject the man whom you have just refused? He cannot but esteem you and your love.”

She knew not how long she lay there. She laughed and wept, lamented and rejoiced.

Her maid entered. It was time to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

THE queen was ill. Her life was saved, but a hope was lost. It was on a stormy morning in spring, that Baum, carrying a little coffin that contained the corpse of a still-born babe, descended the back stairs of the palace. He walked so softly that he did not hear his own footsteps. He was followed by Madame Leoni, the queen's waiting-woman, who held a white handkerchief to her eyes. At the foot of the stairs, a carriage was in waiting. Baum was obliged to tell the coachman, who was not in court livery, where to drive to. Scarcely any one in the palace knew of what was going on.

They drove out of town and towards the church-yard. An unnamed child is not placed in the vault, but is buried in the public cemetery. The grave-digger was waiting for them. The little corpse was lowered into the open grave, without a name or sign to mark its place of burial.

About the same time that Baum and Madame Leoni were out at the churchyard, Walpurga was thus writing home:

“ Thank God! all's over. Now I can look forward to happier days. We've had a terrible time here. If all goes well, there are only seven Sundays more till I come home again. I can hardly believe it possible that I've got to go away from here again, and yet I'll thank God a thousand times, when I'm with you once more. If I stay here, I shall grow quite

stupid from thinking so much. There's misery everywhere and people take pleasure in each other's wickedness, and, even if it is n't true, they imagine it is and find pleasure in it, besides.

"There was some talk about our getting a place here, where we could all be comfortable for life; but the queen said that it would be better for me to go home, and whatever she says, is right. She's a true queen, just as a queen ought to be. God has made her so, on purpose.

"I'd only like to know why she has to suffer so much.

"Oh, what a time we've had. Every minute, we thought the queen— There's not another soul like her in the world, and she had so much to bear, and we're all human after all. But now, thank God, all's over. The king's doctor says the danger's over. But, of course, what we hoped for, is gone. I can't tell you how it made me feel, to think that I was so well, and I felt as if I must go to the queen and give up every drop of my blood to save her.

"Whenever I had a chance, I went down to the church—they have their church in the house here—and prayed for the queen. My Countess has never once come to me. They say she looks like a shadow. All the passages here are heated and the whole house is just like one warm room, and the people in the palace would pass each other, without taking notice of any one.

"On the evening that the queen thought she was going to die, she sent for me and the child. She did n't say much, but her eyes told it all.

"And now, Hansei, keep yourself ready; you must come for me. Next time I write, I'll tell you the very day when you're to come.

"I feel as if I could n't wait; and yet it makes my heart ache to think that I must leave my prince, for he loves me so. But I can't help it. I've got a child, a husband and a mother of my own, at home, and am tired of being in service and among strangers.

"Does the storm rage so terribly with you? Oh, how the wind blows. If it would only bear me home. Last night it blew down a tree in front of my window. It was a fine, large tree, and fell on a figure which it broke to pieces. Every one said it was very beautiful, but I could n't see any beauty in such a thing. It seemed ever so impudent as it stood there, and was enough to make one blush. I could see the tree and the figure from my window, and people are already there, putting things to rights, and carrying all that's damaged out of the way.

"They're very quick about such things here, whether it be a tree, a marble figure, or a dead child.

"Forgive me for writing such a mixed-up letter. When I get home again, I can never tell you all that I've gone through here, if I live to be a hundred years old.

"And when you come, dear Hansei, just put on the clothes that the king sent, and one of the fine shirts that I made for you when

we were married. They're in the blue closet on the upper shelf on the left-hand side with the red ribbon. Forgive me for writing all this to you, but you've had to take care of yourself almost a year, and I have n't been able to help you, or get your things for you. Now that will all come right again. I feel as if I were at home already, pulling your shirt collar straight, as we go to church of a Sunday morning. I feel as if it was some one else who had gone through all this, and as if the days were a high mountain that one can never cross. But all will be right again, and we'll be merry and happy together, for, thank God, we've sound limbs, and true hearts. Forgive me, all of you, if I've ever said a single word to offend you.

"If I had you here, dear Hansei, I'd put my arms round your neck and kiss you to my heart's content. You and the child and mother are all the world to me. I'm just beginning to feel how much I love you all, and I can't understand how I could stay away from you so long, without dying of grief and homesickness.

"Do n't forget to bring a large chest with you for they've given me ever so many things.

"And bring me something out of our garden; one of my pinks, and also one of the child's shoes. But I'll tell you more plainly about this, in my next letter.

"I can't fall into the ways of the court folk. I'm told that they can't touch or dress their own dead. They have it all done by strangers, who are paid for it.

"I've been spinning flax this winter, for shirts for my prince. They were all pleased with it, and came to my room to look on and seemed as much astonished as if it were something wonderful.

"I like to think of working in the fields again, it makes one much healthier. But do n't worry, for nothing ails me, except that I am terribly homesick.

"And now farewell; a thousand times farewell!

"Your

"WALPURGA ANDERMATTEN."

While Walpurga, with slow and heavy hand, toiled at her letter, Countess Irma sat at her desk, in the room below, and dashed off the following lines:

"*My Dearest Emma*: What a night I've passed—I must be endowed with herculean strength, or I should not have lived through it. I have looked into the fiery eyes of the glaring monsters who dwell above and below our daily life and who suddenly, and without warning, burst upon us. You must suffer me to return to you,—to write to you once more. I do n't know how long it is since I've done so. You are my fortress, my rock, my shelter. You are firm, immovable, steadfast, patient. When in distress, I come to you. I flee to you.

"It was a terrible night. The tree still stands, but a young

blossom was broken off. I came from the queen's apartment; I could not pray, but stood by the window, and thought, while I looked out into the night: Thou who renewest everything, who awakenest the earth from its wintry sleep, breathing new life into trees and flowers and all that faded and withered last year—suffer a human heart to renew itself; let past deeds be destroyed and forgotten. Suffer a child of man, regenerate and redeemed, to begin life anew. I stood at the casement, while the wind howled without. Suddenly there was a fearful crash. A tall oak before my window had been broken by the angry wind. The tree top-pled and, in its fall, dashed a statue of Venus, which stood beneath it, into fragments. It all seemed like a feverish dream, and when I realized what had happened, my only wish was: O that I had been in the statue's place! O that I had been dashed to atoms— It would have been far better for me.

"I hardly know what to tell you. I only know that I may again be with you—perhaps to-day, to-morrow, at night or in the daytime, I shall fall on my knees to you and you will lift me up. I shall rest on your heart, and you will protect me. You will save me from the demons; you will not question me; you will give food and drink and rest to the stranger soul, and will not ask whence it comes.

"What are we? What is the world? We see and know all, and yet—

"How ingenious the devices with which the world lulls its conscience into slumber— If there were only no awakening! The awakening—the morrow—that is the most terrible thought of all.

"An eternal kiss rests upon a statue at the arsenal, and the stars, the moon and the sun look down upon it. If I could but climb up there, hurl myself to the earth and destroy myself—the world—everything!

"Should you hear the bells tolling loudly, know that it is my funeral. If there be a gentle knock at your door, think that it is a poor soul that was once so rich—might still be—aye, is. Who can restore a human being to himself? Who draws him out of the lake—out of the lake—

"Why is it that the lake is constantly before my eyes? I see myself in it—I sink! Help me! Save me, Emma! Help me, I sink—!"

Irma suddenly uttered a loud shriek. The maid hurried into the room. Her mistress had fainted and lay on the floor.

When she revived, she asked what had happened to her. Doctor Gunther sat at her bedside and said:

"You've been writing; here is the letter. I took charge of it, as I supposed it was this that had so excited you. I read the first six lines. I was obliged to, but I assure you, on my honor, that I did not read a word more. I took charge of the letter, so that no

other eye should see it. And now, keep yourself quiet ; here it is."

Irma sat up and read the letter. Then she looked at the Doctor earnestly, and said :

"I believe you."

She called for a light and consigned the letter to the flames.

"Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That you will give me poison, if I lose my mind."

"You are playing with extremes," replied the physician, "and that can't be done with impunity."

After a long pause, Gunther said :

"Above all things, you must control yourself, and must not imagine that these wild, wandering thoughts are your true self. I thought that you would take my advice, but I was mistaken. You are your best, your only, physician ; force yourself to rest and let calm and happy thoughts alone engage you."

Irma rested her head on her hand. Her eyes glowed with feverish fire. She closed them, but suddenly arose and, seizing her loosened hair with both hands, exclaimed :

"I will have my hair cut off."

"That is another of your wild thoughts," said Gunther, calming her, and taking her hand in his. "You always wish to accomplish your desires by violent methods. You must acquire repose."

"Yes, life is a slow and gradual growth, and death, yes, death in life, takes but a moment," said Irma, with a wild and vacant stare.

"And now go to sleep, and you will soon be well again," said Gunther. He was about to leave, but Irma detained him, and enquired :

"How is your wife—your family?"

"Thank you," said he. "They are calm and resigned."

Irma was about to beg that Gunther's wife might visit her, but could not force herself to do so. Gunther left. He, himself, thought that if Irma would frankly open her mind to his wife, the good sense of the latter would gradually help the distracted one. But he knew that his wife would not visit Irma. With all her kindness of heart, she had no mercy for arrogance, and Irma, in her prosperous days, had neglected to revisit the house in which she had received so hearty a welcome. Ever since Irma had again left her father and returned to court, its doors were closed to her. Irma, moreover, was regarded as having promoted the revival of the convents and the appointment of the reactionary ecclesiastical ministry of which Schnabelsdorf was premier.

CHAPTER XIII.

WALPURGA'S thoughts were of home, and she tried to picture to herself how it would be when her letter arrived there. But she had been away so long that she found it difficult to do so. The letter had arrived at dusk, and Hansei, who was out in the backyard, chopping wood, was called in. He hurriedly lit the lamp, and Stasi read the letter to them. The grandmother wept, and the child on her lap moved about restlessly, as if it felt that the words it heard were its mother's. Nor could they help noticing that it had twice pulled the letter out of Stasi's hand, and that, in order to finish reading it, she had been obliged to move her seat. The child had, nevertheless, remained restless as before. At last, the grandmother dried her tears and said: "Thank God, that I have such a child. I don't mean you," said she to her granddaughter, "I mean your mother. You may be glad if you turn out as good as she is." Hansei listened with mouth agape, and smiled all over his face when they came to the passage about Walpurga's embracing him.

When she had finished the letter, Stasi said:

"It's a sad letter for all; but she'll be so much the happier when she gets home again. I'm only sorry that I shan't meet her when she does come."

Stasi was to be married on the following Sunday, to a forest-keeper who lived near the frontier, on the other side of the mountain.

Hansei took the letter again and was about to go away.

"Leave the letter here," whispered the mother to him. "That's not the sort of a letter to read aloud at the Chamois. There are things in it which only man and wife ought to tell each other when they're alone."

"Yes, you're right," said Hansei. "Here's the letter." He was, nevertheless, sorry that the folks would not be able to see what a pretty letter his wife could write, and how much she loved him, and how good she was, and that none in the whole village deserved to be spoken to by her, for his Walpurga was the pride of his life.

"Yes, grandmother," said he, while he stood in the doorway, "thank God, the longest time's over. I can hardly understand how we managed to live without each other so long, or how it'll be when she sits in this low room again. But that'll be all right, and there are other houses besides this."

Hansei spoke these last words quite rapidly. He wanted his mother-in-law to understand that he was about to purchase a house. It was proper that she should know of it, but there was no need of her interference, lest she should rule him. The inn-keeper was quite in the right.

Hansei could hardly wait until he was again with his privy counselor, and this privy counselor was, of course, the innkeeper. He looked up at the house and the trees, as if to say: "Just keep still, and don't be afraid. She'll come back again in good time, and she still thinks of you all. She knows many a thing, and would make a better queen than many another woman, and could reign better than the strongest man—" When Hansei arrived in front of the inn, he waited for a little while, in order to get his breath, and compose himself. It is no light matter to have such an extraordinary wife; one is very apt to be thrown into the back-ground and to be less thought of. He was proud of his wife, but he was the husband, nevertheless. He went into the inn quietly, and sat down to a schoppen of wine, as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"That's the way a man should be," thought he to himself, while he took a comfortable draught. "It won't do to tell the world everything. Keep things to yourself. That makes the master; and that's what the women can't do."

Hansei patted Dachsel and Wachsen, the landlord's two dogs, who seemed to be fond of him, for they knew their master's favorites.

"Is it long since you've heard from your queen?" asked the host, casually.

"No. Only to-day."

"What does she say?"

"All sorts of things," said Hansei, discreetly, adding, in a careless manner, "I want to ask your advice about something presently."

The other guests looked up in surprise, to find Hansei the woodcutter addressing the innkeeper in this familiar tone, and were none the less astonished that the latter did not object.

"If you've got more paper money, it would be quite convenient," replied the innkeeper.

"I've none this time, but I want to talk to you about another matter."

The host went into the back room, sent his wife out to wait on the guests, and exclaimed: "Come in, Hansei." A secret council was held in the back room.

Hansei told him that his wife would return in seven weeks from yesterday, that she had written to him to come for her, and that, while he knew how to carry himself in the world—

"Yes, that you do," said the host, "it was only yesterday that the chief forester—he was sitting in the very seat you're in, now—said: 'That Hansei's a sharp fellow'."

Hansei smiled his thanks for the compliment. "But I want to ask you about something."

"What is it?"

"Look here. You're so much—how shall I say it?—so much readier with your mouth, and more mannerly than I am, and if I have to go to the capital and stand up before the king and queen and all the grand gentlemen, why—why—why, look here, whenever I think of it, even now, it chokes me, and my opinion is that you'd better go along as my mouthpiece and say everything properly. One does n't have such a chance more than once in a lifetime, and it won't do to forget anything."

"That's a clever thought of yours," said the innkeeper.

"You shan't do it for nothing and the journey shan't cost you a groschen."

"No, I can't go with you. At court, it won't do to say: 'This is my child's godfather, my comrade, and he's to come in, too, and speak for me.' The one who has the audience is the only one who's allowed to speak. If you want to have a little fun, and your wife's agreed, I might go as Walpurga's husband—that would do."

"No," cried Hansei, "I won't do any such thing, and my wife would n't, either. That won't do at all."

"Well, my dear fellow, all that remains is to go and speak for yourself."

Hansei was sad. He felt as if thrust out of doors. He had not been brought up and schooled for such things as talking to the king and queen and their courtiers, and was afraid of what he might do to them if they were to laugh at and ridicule him, for he would n't stand that. He would allow no one to make sport of him, in his wife's presence, for he was the husband and she only the wife.

"Do n't be so faint-hearted—a man like you—" said the innkeeper, consolingly, while Hansei rubbed his forehead as if to make another head out of his own. "Just pretend I was the king. What would you say?"

"You speak first."

"All right." The innkeeper placed himself in position, put his hand in the breast of his coat, balanced himself on one foot, threw his head back, and said gravely:

"Ah, and so you're the husband of—ah, what's her name—of Walpurga?"

"Yes, she's my wife."

"Have you been a soldier?"

"No, by your leave."

"You need n't say 'by your leave,' but you must add 'Your Majesty,' and always as short as possible. The high folk never have any time to spare; they're always in a hurry and everything is counted out to the very minute. But what's the use of worrying ourselves already? We'd better settle our little business now. You buy my house and fields. I'll let you have them cheap, and then when the king asks how it goes with you, you can

answer : 'Your Majesty, it would go very well with me ; but I still owe three thousand florins on my house and farm and they trouble me greatly.' And when you say that, you 'll see that the king will give you the three thousand florins at once. But if you did n't owe it, you could n't say it. I know you. You 're an honest fellow and can't tell a lie, and you know you might just as well say four thousand, or five thousand—it's all the same—and you 'll have some money over to build with. But there 's no need of that, and so you can lay in a stock of wine instead."

"Yes, yes, you 're right, but I think we 'll make it a sham sale, for I ought n't do it without my wife's consent. The money really comes from her, and I do n't even know whether she 's willing to have the inn. We 'll just make it a sham sale, and, if the king gives me the money and my wife 's agreed, it 'll be all right."

The host had, before that, flattered Hansei on account of his cleverness, but now, when there was real occasion for his doing so, held his peace. After a pause, he said : "While the clever fellow makes up his mind, the fool has time to make up his. I 'll think about it."

They returned to the inn-parlor. Hansei felt ill at ease and soon went home. On the way, old Zenza greeted him. He made believe that he neither saw nor heard her, and hurried on. How glad he was that he had not become wicked, and how would he have felt now, if he had allowed himself to be tempted. Nothing would have been left him but to drown himself in the lake before Walpurga's return.

When he reached home, he said to himself : "I can still enter here with a good conscience and, God be praised, I can bid her welcome with a good conscience." After he got into bed, he kept on repeating the words : "God be praised," to himself, until he at last fell asleep. When he awoke, the first thing he said was : "Good morning, Walpurga." He addressed his words to the empty air, but he felt as if she must hear him, as if she were at home already, for she had sent so good a messenger in advance. The letter was like a postilion playing welcome melodies. Hansei lay there dreaming, with his eyes wide open, until late in the day. But the day was both a good and an evil one. He had promised his comrades to go out hunting with them. All at once, it occurred to him that it was time to give up such sport. He would gladly have remained at home, but feared the talk of the innkeeper and, though the hills were far away, he felt as if he could distinctly hear the innkeeper telling his comrades : "Ha ! Ha ! His wife 's coming home, and she 's the master, and Hansei will have to lie down as she bids him." He fancied that he heard his laughing comrades walking about in the woods and calling out : "Lie down, Hansei ; lie down," as if he were a dog.

An advocate at the provincial court,—for Hansei now had such

distinguished companions—was also with the hunting party, and would laugh and jeer more than any of them. And then, to add to the fun, the innkeeper would tell a fine story about the letter. Thank God, he had n't had a chance to read it. That would have been too bad. If I only had n't mentioned it; but I'm too stupid and can't keep a thing to myself. If the innkeeper knew nothing of the letter, I could turn back without feeling ashamed and without minding their jeers. But my mind's made up. I shan't go with them again. I used to get along by myself, and I will again, when she comes back. We'll need no one, then. Hansei was busy thinking, that morning. He looked back upon how he had been living all this time. He felt so homesick about his wife at first, that he could not remain in the house and was unable to eat, drink, sleep, or work. So he went to the inn, where they wished him joy because his wife had brought him such good luck, and this had pleased him; and when others stopped talking about it, he would renew the subject; and the innkeeper would take him along to fairs, target-shootings and pleasure-parties. One could not help but admit it was all very pleasant and entertaining, and the folks would say: "There goes Hansei, whose wife is the crown prince's nurse." Wherever he went they showed him great respect, and it's very pleasant to be received with respect wherever you go. Before allowing him to sit down, the hostess would always wipe off the chair with her apron, and considered it a pleasure to do so. At last, a happy thought occurred to him, and he still held fast to it. He would be the very man to keep an inn, and his wife would be the best hostess from one end of the land to the other. She would know how to talk to the people; and, after all, what is there pleasanter in the world than keeping an inn?

Hansei was so long in getting up, that the grandmother came to the door and asked: "Is anything the matter? Are you sick?"

"Oh no, God forbid. I'm coming directly," replied Hansei. He soon came and, in a kindly tone, said: "Good morning. Is the child hearty?"

"Yes. All's well, thank God," said the grandmother. She was always the same, whether Hansei was rude and taciturn, or talkative and confidential.

During her daughter's absence, she had never interfered with him but once, and then she had said: "You're the husband and the father, and should know what to do, and what to let alone." She knew very well that if she attempted to induce Hansei to give up his free life and his comrades, he would be less likely to do so, if it were only to avoid the appearance of being ruled by the old woman.

"Will you be at home at noon, or are you going across the field?"

"I'll stay at home," said he, "I want to split wood. We'll

clear up things and make it look tidy about the house, by the time she returns."

The grandmother nodded a pleased assent. Hansei would gladly have said more, but he always thought that another ought to speak first, and so he sat there, stuffing potato after potato into his mouth, just as if every one were an answer he had received. With every potato that he paped, he thought of the clever things he would say to the king. He felt that the latter could not escape him. Six thousand florins could be counted on; and of five thousand he felt quite sure.

"If the king gives us a good farm on a royal estate, or any other appointment, we'll move away from here," said Hansei aloud. He thought that the grandmother must know that he would gladly break loose from his comrades and begin a changed life, elsewhere.

"Yes, yes," was all that the grandmother said.

"I think we must soon write an answer, and I'll write to her, too. She seems so very sad."

"Yes, yes; do so. I must go to the child."

In promising to write to his wife, Hansei had imposed a difficult task upon himself. He would have liked to write kind, consoling, hearty words; to have cautioned her not to worry so much about the few weeks that still remained, and thus, perhaps, lose sight of what advantages might present themselves. Now was the time to be in good spirits, for pay-day was fast approaching. He had all these thoughts in his head, and she would respect him for the manly advice he was about to offer. But to get these ideas out of his head and on paper, was a difficult task.

Consoling himself with the words: "There's no need of my writing. I'll see her soon, and can tell her everything far better," he gave up the attempt.

While the grandmother went into the room in which the child lay, Hansei remained sitting at the table and emptied the whole dish of potatoes, while he was, in imagination, explaining to the king how well he understood forest matters. When the last potato was eaten, he went out, took axe, mallet and wedge and, with mighty strokes, split the stumps which had been piled up along the road in front of the garden. He had just taken off his coat, for, in spite of the keen spring breeze, he did n't feel cold, when a voice said: "Ah, you're still here." The innkeeper stood behind him with his rifle slung over his shoulder and accompanied by his two dogs, Dachsels and Wachsel. "You must have overslept yourself, just as I did. If we take the road through the valley and the ravine, we can still catch up with our comrades. Come, hurry and dress yourself, and get your gun."

As if this were a command which he must obey, Hansei carried axe, mallet and wedge into the house, dressed himself, took his gun and said to the grandmother: "I think I'll go along, after

all." He would have liked to say: "I shall only go this once, so that they do n't think that I stay at home on account of my wife's letter," but he held his peace. It is n't necessary to tell everything, and those to whom you do tell all, have a right to interfere in all. I want to arrange everything myself, and she must respect me for doing it.

Hansei accompanied the innkeeper to the hunt. He was in a good humor and more cheerful than ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

"How was it once? How will it be?"
 I prithee, darling, ask not me.
 Our life's the Present—hold it fast,
 And let each hour in joy be passed.

Lift up thine eyes, so bright and clear;
 To search my heart, thou need'st not fear.
 Come, let us gather Flora's sweets,
 Ere wintry storm around us beats.

THUS sang Irma, with clear, ringing voice. Nature was again decked in beauteous array. The sharp winds of early spring were still blowing, and the sunlight was often suddenly obscured by floating snow-clouds. But the grass had begun to grow in the meadows, and here and there spring flowers were blooming.

Irma had recovered, after a few days. The bulletins respecting the queen's health had ceased, and Gunther, who had lived in the palace for weeks, now returned to his own house.

The queen, who was now permitted to leave her apartment, spent much of her time in the winter-garden, where the last fête had been celebrated. The trees and flowers were again in their wonted places; the fountains plashed, the fish swam about in the marble basin, and the birds twittered in their great cages. Walpurga and the prince were allowed to remain with the queen for hours at a time. All vied with each other in offering her delicate attentions which were inspired by something more than a mere sense of what was due her rank. Irma had shown so much devotion to the queen that the latter felt like begging her pardon. She often had the words upon her lips, but could not utter them. Friendship suffers from mere suspicion, and the queen well knew that she was looked upon as weak-minded and vacillating. She determined that she would be thus no longer. She felt that the great mark of a strong character is to prevent the world from knowing every change and phase of thought and feeling, and to give it naught but results.

No one should ever know what had so troubled her heart. She would be strong.

She kept Irma about her much of the time, and the hours they

spent in the green, flowering, winter-garden, reading, working, conversing or singing, were serene and blissful.

Irma, who was an excellent reader, read Goethe's Tasso to them. It accorded with their present mood, and one day, Irma said:

"Your Majesty resembles Princess Leonora in many things. You have the advantage, however, of being able to accomplish in a few weeks what, in her case, it required years to bring about."

"I do n't understand you."

"What I mean is, that long confinement to the sick-room and careful nursing are apt to produce, in the invalid, a certain sensitiveness and an almost imperceptible change in manner. It is well to escape from this hot-house mood into the open air; to be once again among the trees which are proof against all weathers, and to inhale the fresh, life-giving breeze."

The king was often present during these readings, and frequently felt moved to express his thoughts on the weightiest and most beautiful passages in Tasso. Irma often trembled. Every word she uttered seemed wicked. She felt that she no longer had a right to speak of pure and holy subjects, but the king was so cheerful and unconstrained that she speedily dismissed all concern.

"You are spoiling me, and will make me quite vain," said the queen, one day. "I have another wish. I long to go from flowers to works of art. I often feel like visiting the picture-gallery and the collection of antiques. When we move among the achievements of art, the deepest impression we receive is, that human beings who lived long ago, have bequeathed their best possessions to us, and that eyes long since closed in death, look down upon us with their undying glances, and are still with us."

At the words "undying glances," the king and Irma looked at each other with involuntary surprise. To them, the words were suggestive. Irma composed herself and replied:

"I cannot help joining in Your Majesty's wish: from flowers and trees to works of art! Surrounded by pictures and statues, the soul dwells in an ideal atmosphere; life everlasting environs us; we inhale the very breath of genius which, although its possessors may have vanished from earth, endures for ever. When I was forced to the conclusion that I was without real artistic talent, I envied the monarchs to whom is vouchsafed the happiness of encouraging talent and genius in others. That is a great compensation."

"How beautifully she interprets everything," said the queen, addressing her husband; and it was with a mingled expression of delight and pain that the king regarded the two ladies. What was passing in his mind? He admired and loved Irma; he respected and loved his wife. He was untrue to both.

Irma and the queen went through the galleries and the collection

of antiques, and would sit for hours, looking at the pictures and statues. Every remark of the queen's was met by an observation of Irma's, which was in full accord with hers.

"When I look at and listen to you two," said the king, "and think of where you resemble each other and where you differ, it seems as if I saw the daughters of Schiller and Goethe before me."

"How singular!" interposed the queen, and the king continued:

"Goethe saw the world through brown, and Schiller through blue eyes; and so it is with you two. You look through blue eyes, like Schiller's, and our friend through brown eyes, like those of Goethe's."

"It won't do to let any one know that we flatter each other so," said the queen, smiling. Irma looked up to the ceiling, where painted angels were hovering in the air. There is a world of infinite space where no one can supplant another; it is only in the everyday world that exclusiveness exists, thought she to herself.

The more the queen gained in strength, the more marked was the change from a subdued, to a bright and cheerful vein.

It seemed as if Irma's wish was about to be realized. The life-renewing power of spring which reanimates the trees and the plants, seemed to extend its influence over human life. It seemed as if the past were buried and forgotten.

It was on the first mild day of spring, and they were walking together in the palace-garden, when the queen said:

"I can't imagine that there ever was a time when we did not know each other, dear Irma." She stopped and looked into Irma's eyes with an expression radiant with joy. "You once told me about a Greek philosopher," said she, addressing Doctor Gunther, who was walking after them with the captain of the palace-guard, "who thought that our souls had a previous existence, and that our best experience, in this world, is merely the recollection of what we have experienced or imagined to ourselves in some earlier state of being."

"Without accepting this fanciful theory," replied Gunther, "there is much in life which may be regarded as destiny. I believe that all living truths which we take up into ourselves, and which thus, as it were, become a part of our being, were intended for us. Our mind, the whole constitution of our being, is destined for and attuned to it. There is thus perfect correspondence between our destiny and our capacity. But I beg Your Majesty to regard yourself as destined, at present, to step into your carriage. We must not let the first walk be too long."

The queen and Irma seated themselves in the carriage which awaited them at the Nymph's Grove. They drove on slowly, and the queen said:

"You cannot imagine, dear Irma, how timid and fearful I was when I first came here." She told her how she had looked into

the eyes of the multitude that surrounded her, and had asked herself: "Who of all these does, in truth, belong to you?" and how encouraged she had felt when Irma spoke to her, as it were, with her warm, brown eyes.

"And they were speaking to you," replied Irma. "I should have liked to say to you: 'Sweet being! imagine that we have known each other for years, and feel just as if we had been friends forever.' I fancy that we both felt thus because we were both timid and fearful. It was the first time I had ever been at court, and I felt as if I could n't help taking the lord steward's staff out of his hand, and supporting myself on it."

"How strange! I had the very same thought," said the queen, "and, now that I think of it, I can still recollect that the lord steward looked at me incessantly."

The affection of the two ladies was cemented by a hundred little memories. The carriage drove on slowly, but their thoughts took in days and months. There was a turn in the road; they had just reached the place where the statue had been shattered.

"It was a terrible night," said the queen, "when that happened, and it seems to me that simple-minded Walpurga is right when she says that it is wrong for us thus to expose the undraped human figure."

"I must be permitted to differ with Your Majesty," replied Irma. "The free—why should we mince words?—the nude, beautiful human form is the only one in accord with free nature. All frippery is subject to changes of taste and fashion. The human form as shaped by the hand of nature, is alone fitted to stand in her temple."

"You are a free soul; far freer than I am," said the queen. They alighted. Irma accompanied the queen to her apartments and then returned to her own. When she found herself alone, she threw up her hands, exclaiming:

"What is the greatest punishment? It is not hell, where other guilty ones suffer with us! No; to be conscious of guilt and yet condemned to remain beside a pure and happy creature; that is far worse than all the torments of hell!"

"God keep you, Irma! God keep you!" shrieked the parrot. Irma started with a shudder.

CHAPTER XV.

SPRING returned, ushered in by the merry singing of larks and finches, and bringing with it the latest Paris fashions. The queen now appeared in public, and the ladies of the capital were delighted to pattern their costumes after hers.

The queen drove out, with Irma beside her, and Walpurga and the prince opposite.

"You must not worry when you're at home again," said the queen to Walpurga.

Addressing the queen in French, Irma said, with a smile: "Countess Brinkenstein would disapprove of your manifesting any interest in the future fortunes of one whose term of service is at an end."

With a degree of boldness that surprised her two well-wishers, Walpurga said: "There'll be one advantage at any rate, for, at home, they won't treat me as if I were deaf and dumb."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, they would n't, while I was about, say things that I can't understand."

Irma endeavored to pacify her, but without avail. Walpurga's longing for home had made her exacting and dissatisfied. She felt ill at ease everywhere, and felt sure that the very people who had done so much to humor and spoil her would soon get along without her.

There was another and a deeper cause for her feeling annoyed when Irma spoke French. A youthful-looking nurse from one of the French cantons of Switzerland had become a member of the prince's household. She could not understand a word of German, and that had been the principal reason for engaging her. The prince was to speak French before he acquired any other language.

Walpurga and the new-comer were, as regarded each other, like two mutes. Nor was she otherwise favorably disposed towards the tall, handsome girl with the French cap. She was, indeed, quite jealous of her. What has the foreigner to do with the child? She was, at times, angry at the child itself.

"You'll soon *parlez vous* so that I shan't be able to understand a word," she would say, when alone with him, and would feel quite angry; and, the very next minute, she would exclaim: "God forgive me! How well it is that I'll soon be home again. I can count the days on my fingers."

Mademoiselle Kramer now told Walpurga that a chamber* had been prepared for the crown prince.

"He has rooms enough already," said Walpurga.

Mademoiselle Kramer was again obliged to undertake the difficult task of explaining the court custom, in such matters, to Walpurga, who made her go over the various names again and again. She would always begin thus: "The crown prince will have an ayah—"

"Ayah? what sort of a word's that? what does that mean?"

"It means the prince's waiting-maid. And when his royal highness becomes four years old, he will have a new set of officers;

* Kammer—meaning here the chamberlain and other officers composing the household.

and so on, as he grows older, only the new set will always be of higher rank than those who precede them."

"Yes, I can easily understand it," thought Walpurga; "new people and new palaces, constant change; how lucky that your eyes and your limbs are fast to you; if it was n't for that, they 'd be getting you new ones every year or two."

Walpurga felt reassured when she learned that Frau von Gerloff, a lady of noble birth and, hitherto, first waiting-woman to the queen, had been appointed as ayah to the prince. Walpurga had known her for a long while and said to her:

"If any one had asked me who should take charge of the prince, you 'd have been my first choice. This is only another proof of the queen's wisdom and her kind heart. She gives up her dearest friend for the sake of her son."

Walpurga deemed it necessary to give Frau von Gerloff various directions as to the management of the prince. The good lady listened to her patiently. When Walpurga next saw the queen, she felt it necessary to express her satisfaction with the arrangements which had been made.

"You 'd have done very well," said she to Madame Leoni, the queen's second waitingmaid; "but our good queen can't afford to part with both hands at once."

Madame Leoni smiled her thanks, although she really felt mortified and thought that she had been slighted because of her being a commoner. But the first law of court life is: "Take offense at nothing."

The slumbering infant-prince had no idea of the jealous feelings which already played about his cradle.

By degrees, Walpurga got her effects ready and, when packing up certain articles, she would say: "No one would dream that heart's blood is clinging to you."

Doctor Gunther had given orders that Walpurga should often leave the prince for awhile, in order that he might gradually grow accustomed to her absence.

Mademoiselle Kramer, who, during the first few days accompanied her on her walks, found the occupation a difficult one, for Walpurga wanted to stop at every shop window, and whenever she saw men or women whose costume resembled that worn at her home, wanted to go up to them and enquire whence they had come, and whether they knew her husband, her child and her mother. Mademoiselle Kramer soon wearied of the office of guide, and would sometimes allow Walpurga to go out alone, on which occasions she would entrust her with her watch, so that she might return at the proper time. Walpurga's great delight was to watch the soldiers parading at guard-mounting, and her route generally led her beyond the city gates. She would walk along the highway that led to her home. This comforted her,

and she would often think of how she had felt when coming to the palace by that very road. It seemed to her as if ages had passed since then, and it was not without an effort, at times, that she induced herself to retrace her steps. She would often stand there listening, and imagining that she could hear her child's voice borne on the breeze. Which child? Her heart was divided and she hurried back to the prince. It was well he rested so quietly in the arms of the Frenchwoman. Walpurga, however, was vexed at this circumstance, and laughed triumphantly when he wanted to be taken by her as soon as he noticed her.

"Yes, you're a true soul," said she. "When men are good, they're a great deal better than women. Your other father, my Hansei, is very good, too, and he's coming, day after to-morrow, and you'll shake hands with him when he comes,—so."

Walpurga observed that the ayah was almost beside herself at this mode of treating the child, and that it cost Mademoiselle Kramer an effort to prevent her from putting a veto upon it; but this only made Walpurga the more wanton in her mad pranks with the prince.

"Now do n't forget," said she, "that I gave you myself to feast upon. The others only give you what comes from the kitchen. We two are one, and day after to-morrow my Hansei will come, and then I'll go home, and when you're a big boy you must come and see me; and if it's in cherry time, I'll give you the best cherries. And my Hansei will go hunting with you and will carry your gun for you, and you'll shoot a great big stag and a roe, and a cham-ouis, and we'll roast them. I'll stick a nosegay on your hat, and then we'll row over the lake together, and I'll give you a kiss, and then I'll bid you good-bye."

The child laughed heartily, while Walpurga looked into his eyes and spoke to him thus. Then it laid its little head on her cheek, and Walpurga cried out:

"Mademoiselle Kramer! Mademoiselle Kramer! he knows how to kiss already; he's kissing me now. Yes, you're the right sort of a man and a king's son to boot; they always begin betimes."

It seemed as if she wanted to make known all the love she had for the child during the few days that yet remained to her at the palace, and she did this both from affection and spite, for she desired to show the Frenchwoman how very much she and the child loved one another. He would never grow to love the foreigner as much as he loved Walpurga, and then she would sing:

Standing by yon willow tree,
Scarcely weeping, thou dost see
My bark put off from shore.

As long as willows grow,
As long as waters flow,
Thou'lt see me nevermore.

While she sang, the boy crowed and laughed, and Walpurga protested to Mademoiselle Kramer, that she would wager her head he understood everything already.

"And besides," said she, with an angry glance at the Frenchwoman, "the language that little children speak is the same all the world over. Is n't it so? The French do n't come into the world speaking gibberish." Then she would sing and dance about, and kiss the child again. It seemed as if she must repress all her sadness, and, in one outburst, give vent to all her joy.

"You excite the child too much; you will do it harm," said Mademoiselle Kramer, endeavoring to quiet her.

"That won't harm him; he's got the right stuff in him. No Frenchwoman can spoil him."

Walpurga was in a restless and contradictory mood. She had long known that the tie would be broken, and had often wished and hoped for that end. But now when the moment of separation approached, all painful memories vanished. She felt that she could never again live alone. She would always miss something, even the trouble and excitement; and, besides, everything had always come all right again. She felt hurt, moreover, that the others seemed so indifferent about her leaving them. And the child—why had n't it sense enough to speak and say: "Father and mother, you must n't do this; you must n't take my Walpurga away"?

But now others controlled the child. What would they do with him? Why should she no longer be allowed to interfere, and to say things should be thus and so? She had nursed him from the first day of his life, and they had been together day and night. And how would the days and nights be when they were no longer together?

When Walpurga had finished her supper, she held up the empty dish to the child and, with a bitter tone, said:

"Do you see this? I'm of no more use now than this empty platter."

Nor did she care to sleep. She felt that she could not lose a minute of the time that was yet left her with the child. Although she did at times, drop asleep, she would wake up in a fright; for, in her dream, she had heard children crying—one far off by the lake, and another beside her—and had thought she was standing between them, and that she must divide herself: must be there and here. And then, too, she had heard the cow bellowing, and pulling at the rope, just as it had when fastened to the garden hedge. Walpurga saw it all, quite distinctly; and the cow had such large eyes, and she could feel its warm breath against her face. Then she would wake up and rub her eyes and all would be quiet again, and she would know that it was a dream.

It was the day before her departure. Walpurga bitterly regretted that she had not told Hansei to come sooner. He might have

remained there a day, and she would then have had some one to stretch out his hand in welcome, while now she could only offer hers in farewell.

She walked the streets and looked up into the blue sky—the same blue sky that rested over her home. She went through the little street in which Doctor Gunther lived. She read the name on the door-plate and walked in. A servant conducted her into the Doctor's ante-room, where many patients were waiting to see him. Walpurga gave her name to the servant. All looked at her in astonishment. She was asked to come in without waiting for her turn, and said that she had only come to say good-bye. Gunther told her to go into the garden and wait there for him until his office hours were over. She did so. Madame Gunther was sitting on the steps that led into the garden. She called the peasant woman to her, and when she learned who she was, told her she might wait there. Walpurga sat down. Madame Gunther went on with her work and did not speak a word. She had a decided prejudice against the nurse. Her husband had often told her of Walpurga's peculiarities, and Madame Gunther had concluded that they were full of coquetry, and that she was trying to make a show of her simplicity. Walpurga's appearance only confirmed her in this opinion.

"You are going home again, are n't you?" asked Madame Gunther, at last; for she did not wish to be uncivil.

Walpurga told her how happy she would be at home again.

Madame Gunther looked up. She was one of those persons who are rendered truly happy when freed from a prejudice. Entering into conversation with Walpurga, she soon found that the nurse had been led to exaggerate certain traits of her strong nature, but that it was just this strength of character that had prevented her from losing herself in the new scenes through which she had passed.

Madame Gunther now urged her to keep a stout heart and to avoid making herself unhappy by comparing her home with what she had left behind her in the palace.

"How is it that you know all about it?" asked Walpurga; "have you ever been among strangers?"

"I can put myself in your place," said Madame Gunther with a smile. She was rapidly winning her way to Walpurga's heart.

She asked her into the room; and, when Gunther came down, he found Walpurga on the steps, with his fatherless little grand-child on her lap.

"And now you know my wife, too," said Gunther.

"Yes; but too late."

Gunther also advised Walpurga to keep up her spirits after she got home, and, as he, too, was a native of the Highlands, he gave her a merry description of what her welcome would be.

Gunther said he would see her once more, at the palace, and his wife shook hands with her, saying :

"May you be happy at home."

"I mean to send your mother a present," said the Doctor. "Tell her to try and think of the young student who danced with her at the Kirchweih* many years ago, when she was betrothed to your father. I'll send you six bottles of wine to-day. Tell her to drink them in remembrance of me, but not to take too much at a time."

"I thank you for my mother, and I feel already as if I had been drinking the best of wine," said Walpurga. "My Countess Irma was right, for she always said Madame Gunther would be a lady after my own heart, and now all that I can wish you is, that, to the end of your days, you may be as happy as you've made me."

No notice was taken of her allusion to Irma. Encouraged and strengthened, Walpurga returned to the palace.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE queen came to Walpurga that evening and said: "I shall not say farewell to you. Do n't let us speak of parting. I only wish to thank you with all my heart, for the love you've shown me and my child."

"Oh, queen! how can you thank me? I'll tell no one on earth that the queen has thanked me," cried Walpurga. "But it's only because you're so kind and want to make parting easy to me. Believe me, I'd gladly give every drop of blood in my veins for you and our child. O, good God! our child—I dare n't say that any longer. I must go; but when I get home, I'll have my own child again."

"Yes, Walpurga; that is what I was about to tell you. The greatest happiness on earth is to be at home, and, by this time, you must have seen that it is all one, whether that home be a palace or a cottage."

"You're right there; you can't get more than your fill of eating and sleeping, anywhere. My Hansei'll be here to-morrow morning. May I bring him to the queen and to the king, and to the good ladies and gentlemen of the court, so that he may thank them, too?"

"Never mind that, Walpurga. There's no need of it. Indeed, Doctor Gunther forbade my taking leave of you; but I may, for all that, say good-bye to you again, to-morrow. Believe me, I feel very sorry to part with you."

"If the queen wishes it, I'll remain, and my husband and my whole brood can come, too."

*Church festival.

"No, you had better go home again. If I ever get into your neighborhood, I will pay you a visit. I shall not fail to tell my son how kind you've been to him. He shall never forget you."

Walpurga had put the child in the cradle and cried out:

"Just look! he's talking. We grown-up folks don't understand what the children say, but he understands us." Walpurga now joyfully related that the prince had kissed her, and tried to persuade him to give his mother a kiss, but he would not.

"I shall leave something good for you behind me," said Walpurga to the queen. "I've found something that'll be good for you." Her face glowed with pleasure, and the queen asked:

"What is it?"

"I've found a friend, one of the best of friends, for you. Madame Gunther can speak right to one's heart; just as you do, but in a different way. I think you ought to visit her right often. It would do you good if you could, once in a while, spend an hour in a good neighbor's house. You'd always feel much better after it."

Walpurga eagerly told how delightful it was to visit one's neighbors. The queen smiled at Walpurga's ignorance of the conditions of court life, and explained to her that she could only have intercourse with those who visited the palace. Walpurga was very sorry that she could not bring about a meeting of the two ladies.

The queen retired.

"Now she's gone," said Walpurga. "I've said nothing at all; and I feel as if I had ever so much to say to her." She felt as if she ought not to leave the queen—as if she were her only true friend, a faithful companion who, if others were to menace her queen with harm, would hasten to her aid.

She thought of the time the queen had kissed her. How much they had experienced together since that time? Could it be possible that it was scarcely a year ago?

Cowering beside the cradle, she was silent for a long while. At last she softly sang:

My heart doth bear a burden,
And thou hast placed it there;
And I would wager e'en my life
That none doth heavier bear.

Her voice trembled with emotion. The child slept. She got up and told Mademoiselle Kramer that she intended to take leave of all in the palace. Mademoiselle Kramer dissuaded her from doing this. So Walpurga only went in search of Countess Irma, but did not find her, as she had gone to a party at her brother's house. Walpurga told the maid that she intended to leave early the next morning and that she would be very sorry if she did not have a chance to say good-bye. Meanwhile, she took leave of the maid, and recommended her to take great care of the good Countess so

that she might always keep well. Walpurga held out her hand to the maid, but was obliged to draw it back again, for the latter had both hands in the pockets of her silk apron, and, as if mocking Walpurga, merely curtsied to her.

"The higher people are, the better they are," said Walpurga, when she got back to her room. "The queen's the highest and best of them all."

Walpurga was sent for by Countess Brinkenstein, who was standing in the same place and in the same position as when she had received the nurse, nearly a year ago. She had seen this rigid lady almost every day. In all that time she had not become more familiar, but had treated Walpurga with unvarying kindness. It now seemed as if her disposition, or perhaps her office, required her to dismiss Walpurga in a formal manner.

"You have behaved well," said Countess Brinkenstein, with a kindly motion of the hand; "their majesties are satisfied with you. And now, farewell; and keep yourself good."

She did not rise, nor offer her hand to Walpurga. She merely nodded in token of farewell, and Walpurga left.

Although this mode of dismissal was by no means over-gentle or courteous, it, nevertheless, afforded Walpurga great satisfaction. She felt as if she had received a sort of honorable discharge. Although Countess Brinkenstein had ruled with almost military severity, she had always been the same and could always be relied upon. And this consistency was not without its due influence on Walpurga's mind.

In Walpurga's room, stood two large chests, filled to the very top and locked. She had received many presents during the year, and enough money to buy a moderate sized farm. She would sit down, now on one and now on the other chest, and when she at last lay down to rest, she still cast a wistful eye on her treasures. Like wandering spirits, her thoughts roved through the apartments of the palace, and then to her cottage at home, through the garden and over the mountains, until she was suddenly awakened by the crying of the child. She was obliged to ask herself whether it was her own, or a strange child. She speedily quieted the prince, but remained beside his cradle. "Sleep shan't steal another minute of the time that's left us," said she, softly.

Day dawned. Walpurga nursed the child for the last time. A tear dropped on its head; it looked up at her and then fell asleep, resting against her heart. She whispered softly into its little left hand, which she held to her lips.

She put the child in the cradle again, fixed one more sad look upon it, then, with her back turned, walked around the cradle thrice, and, at last, said to Mademoiselle Kramer:

"I'm going now; it's time."

The servants came and carried the chests away. Walpurga was

in so forgiving a mood, that she even took leave of the Frenchwoman. She did not look back towards the cradle, but went down stairs, and ordered the boxes to be carried to an inn near the palace, where she had asked Hansei to meet her. She thought he would surely be on hand by that time, for she had told him the very hour when he could meet her. But Hansei was not there.

Although it was early in the day, there was life and bustle at the inn, which was frequented by the court servants. There was loud carousing, and some liveried servants were inveighing against their masters who, at Count Wildenort's soiree of the previous night, had kept them waiting in the porter's lodge, and the coachman on the box, for nearly three hours. It was said that Count Wildenort had obtained royal permission to set up a roulette table, that there had been high play and that the king had also been there, but not the queen.

Walpurga sat behind the screen, with the hostess, and was seated on the largest of the chests. She went to the front of the house to look for Hansei, but he did not come. Baum brought her a message that she was to go to Countess Irma, but not until nine o'clock. Walpurga wandered about town as if lost. "How the people run past each other," thought she; "no one knows who the other is, and has n't time to ask." At that hour of the day, round hats are not seen on the streets. None but the cap-wearing population is now represented. Baker's men and butcher's boys whistling merrily while at their work, are serving bread and meat. Servant maids stand at the street corners waiting while milk is measured out to them, and market women from the country hurry to their posts, with baskets and hand barrows.

"It'll be just the same to-morrow again, and you'll be gone. Indeed, it do n't concern you to-day," said Walpurga to herself, while she looked on at their busy doings. Just then a large book-seller's shop was opened, and her picture hung in the window. What did it matter to her? No one concerned himself about her feelings.

"To-morrow the picture will still be hanging there; it'll be all the same, whether you're here or not. I believe it's all the same, whether you're in the world or out of it," added Walpurga, as a hearse went by and no one cared to enquire whom they were burying. Every one went his own way.

With heavy heart, Walpurga walked on, feeling as if something were drawing her back to the palace and to the child. She went on until she reached the gate by which Hansei must come. But still he came not.

"If he does n't come at all—if the child at home is ill—if it is dead!" Walpurga was almost frightened to death with thoughts of what might be. She seated herself on a bench near the gate. Horsemen were galloping past, and a blind invalid soldier was playing a merry waltz on his organ.

A clock struck nine, and Walpurga walked through the town. At the palace gate she found Hansei, and his first words were:

"God greet you, Walpurga; you're here at last. Where have you been running to? I've been looking for you, the last two hours."

"Come in here," said Walpurga, leading Hansei into a covered way. "They do n't speak so loud here."

It turned out that, in her last letter, Walpurga had told Hansei to come to the palace, and not to the inn. She begged him to forgive her, for she had been so confused while writing, and then she said: "Now let me give you a good kiss of welcome. Thank God, all are well. I need lots of love and kindness."

She asked him to wait at the door of Irma's apartment, while she went in. Irma was still in bed, but, as soon as she heard Walpurga's voice, asked her to enter. The Countess looked lovely in *deshabille*, but she was quite pale, and her loosened hair lay in wild profusion on the pillow.

"I wanted to give you something to remember me by," said Irma, raising herself, "but I thought the best thing I could give you would be money. Take what's lying there. Take it all; I want none of it. Take it; do n't be afraid, it's real gold, won in honest play. I always win—always— Take out your handkerchief and wrap the money up in it."

Irma's voice was hoarse. The room was so dimly lighted that Walpurga looked about in fear, as if she were in some enchanted apartment; and yet she knew the maid, the tables, the chairs, and could hear the screaming of the parrot in the next room. She knew all this, but she could not help thinking that there might be something wrong about the money. She hurriedly made the sign of the cross over it, and then put it in her pocket.

"And now, farewell," said Irma; "may you be happy; a thousand times happy. You are happier than all of us. When I do n't know where to go to in this world, I shall come to you. You'll receive me, won't you? and will make room for me at your hearth? Now go! go! I must sleep. Farewell, Walpurga, do n't forget me. No thanks; not a word. I'll soon come to you, and then we'll sing again; aye, sing. Farewell!"

"I beg of you, let me say only one single word!" cried Walpurga, grasping her hands. "We can't, either of us, know which of us may die, and then it would be too late."

Irma pressed her hand over her eyes, and nodded assent. Walpurga continued:

"I do n't know what ails you. Something's going wrong with you, and it may go worse yet. Your hands are often so cold and your cheeks so hot. I wronged you that day—the second day after I came here. Forgive me! I'll never wrong you again, even in thought; and no one shall. No one shall ever slander you to

me; but, I beg of you, leave the palace as soon as you can! Go home to—”

“Enough, enough,” said Irma, deprecatingly, and holding her hands before her face as if Walpurga’s words were stones hurled at her. “Enough,” added she, “farewell; do not forget me.”

She held out her hand to Walpurga, who kissed it. The hand was hot, as if with fever.

Walpurga left. The parrot in the ante-room was still crying: “God keep you, Irma.” Walpurga started with terror, and hurried away, as if some one were after her.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Walpurga came out to Hansei, he asked: “Shall I go in, too?”

“No, we’re ready.”

“I think I ought to go to the king and queen. I’ve got a good deal to say to them.”

“No; that won’t do at all.”

“Why not? I know how to talk to them.”

He had frequently rehearsed what he intended to say to the king and queen. He would let them know that he deserved something more for giving up his wife for so long a time.

Walpurga found it difficult to make him understand that it would not do to press the matter. Hansei was not inclined to give up the point, and was, moreover, ashamed of confessing to the innkeeper that he had not sat at the same table with their majesties, and that he had not even seen them.

Walpurga, who herself needed support, was now obliged to make a double effort in order to pacify Hansei, who threatened to become rude and troublesome.

“But I may see your prince? You still have a right to take me there?” asked Hansei.

“Yes, yes,” replied Walpurga, “that can be done.” She, too, was herself glad to have a chance to see the child once more, and this would furnish a good excuse. “What matters it if Mademoiselle Kramer or Frau von Gerloff make sport of Hansei? Day after tomorrow all these people will be nothing to me, and I shall be nothing to them.” Her cheeks glowed with excitement, while she hurriedly led Hansei towards the prince’s apartments. She was met at the door by Mademoiselle Kramer who, when Walpurga stated her wish, answered:

“No; it can’t be done. You must not go in again. Doctor Gunther is there and the child is crying and screaming terribly. Go; in God’s name, go.”

Mademoiselle Kramer disappeared, closing the door after her. Walpurga heard the child cry, and was not allowed to go in and

help it. She was shut out—thrust out of doors. Shame at the treatment she had received in Hansei's presence, and anger at these cruel, ungrateful people struggled within her. At last, she said :

"Come, Hansei ; we must n't demean ourselves."

"Of course not," said Hansei. "It's plain enough that this is the way they treat folks when they have no further need for them."

"Nor do we need them any more. Thank God, that's over," said Walpurga.

She left the palace in an angry mood, and Hansei muttered to himself that he would thrash the first man he met on the way.

They returned to the inn where the chests had been left. They met Baum there, and Hansei again said :

"I'd swear that he's no one but Zenza's Jangerl."

"Jangerl's in America," insisted Walpurga. "I beg of you, do n't trouble yourself about other matters. Let's hurry and get away from here."

"I've arranged to stay for another day. I'd like to see the sights, and would like to go to the theatre for once in my life, and then—"

"Some other time— I want to get home to my child."

"You've been away so long that you need n't mind waiting a day longer."

Walpurga insisted and Hansei was obliged to yield.

"Why do you always look at me?" asked Hansei. "It seems as if you scarcely know me any more."

"I'd forgotten what true, blue eyes you have."

"Well, and so I've been so little in your thoughts that you did n't even remember how I look."

"Be quiet ; I thought of you always. What sort of eyes has the child?"

"Bright and clear ones, and there's never been anything the matter with them."

Walpurga wanted to know what color its eyes were, and whether their color had changed, as had been the case with the prince. But Hansei did not know, and was quite vexed that his wife asked him questions about matters that he knew nothing of.

At last they mounted the wagon.

It drove by the palace, and, in spite of the rattling of the wheels over the stones, it seemed to Walpurga as if she could hear the prince crying.

"I, too, must wean myself," said Walpurga, weeping silently.

As soon as they had passed the city gates, Hansei began abusing the court. "They might have sent us home in a coach ; but that's the way with them. They'd rather fetch our wives than take 'em back again." Whenever he said anything, he would look about as if his boon companions were present to nod their approval.

"They might have let us have a pair of horses at least ; indeed, they ought to have told us to keep them, for they 've got more than they know what to do with, in the royal stables," said he.

Walpurga had so often told every one that her husband was coming to take her home in a wagon, that no arrangements had been made for that purpose ; and now when Hansei grumbled at their want of consideration, she remembered her mistake and, without confessing it, endeavored to quiet him.

"I beg you, for all the world," said she, "do n't say anything against the court. They can't help it. If the king or queen knew of these things, they 'd gladly do everything. But you 've no idea how little the queen knows of the world ; of what costs money, of what has to be bought, or earned, or paid she has no notion at all. She 's just like the angels. They can't count money any more than she can, and have nothing to do with it. She 's as dear as an angel, too. She takes the words out of your heart, and gives you such good ones in return." When she stopped and found that Hansei made no reply, she bit her lips with vexation. How she would have been praised if she had uttered such remarks to Countess Irma or Mademoiselle Kramer. But he behaved as if what she had said were nothing at all. A feeling of discontent struggled within her, but she repressed it. "Yes, I, too, must get used to the change," thought she to herself. "It 's all over. Where I 'm going, they 'll not make much of everything I say." For a long while she was silent. She felt that looking into life-size double-mirrors was now at an end. At last she thought of what the queen had told her : "When you get home, be patient with your people. The way to have peace on earth is to be patient with one another, and to do good to others without hope of recompense. Those who look for no reward are repaid sevenfold." When she left home her mother had given her a piece of bread, with which to deaden her homesickness while at the palace, but the queen had given her words and thoughts that were as bread, for they, too, were life-sustaining and, moreover, long-enduring.

It seemed as if a ray from the queen's sunny nature rested upon Walpurga's countenance. She regained her composure, and calm and gentle thoughts now filled her mind. Suddenly she seized her husband's hand and said :

"Now, God be praised, we hold fast to each other again. You must have lots of patience with me. I 've been among strangers, but you 'll soon see that I 'll be all right again at home."

"Yes, yes, it 's all right," said Hansei.

Wherever they alighted by the way, Hansei would tell the folk at the inn :

"This is my wife ; she 's been nurse to the crown prince, and now, thank God, we 're well to do."

He had become boastful, but Walpurga remained silent in the

presence of others. It was only when they were in the wagon that she became talkative. She asked many questions and Hansei had much to relate, but she heard little of what was said. She was forever thinking of her child, which seemed to be dancing on the mountain peaks; just like the moon which stood in the sky in broad daylight, it ever seemed to move along with them.

"And has it blue eyes?" asked she suddenly, while Hansei was giving her a circumstantial account of the cow that was again giving milk.

"I do n't know what color the calf's eyes are," said Hansei, laughing.

"Oh, do n't think hard of me. I can't think of anything but our child. If we traveled as fast as my thoughts, we'd be home in a twinkling, as tailor Schneck says."

She smiled and checked herself and, soon after, continued: "O how could I ever have stayed away from you so long? It is n't true. I've always been at home and now I'm coming. I'm coming to you, my child. Did n't you hear some one cry, Hansei?" said she, looking round. "I hear some one crying; it sounds like a child."

"Do be quiet. You're enough to frighten one out of his senses."

Walpurga would often look back, for it seemed to her as if she could hear a child crying.

In the city a child *was* crying, and those who were about it could not quiet it. Their diamonds, their gold, their soldiers, were all of no avail. Behind her and before her, Walpurga heard nothing but the crying of a child.

"Why do you shut your eyes?" asked Hansei.

"Oh," replied Walpurga, "I feel like the father of Wastl the weaver. When he was cured of his blindness, he used to say that the trees came towards him, and that everything blinded him. I, too, feel as if I had seen nothing during this whole time. Look! there's the first man with a green hat, and he has his gamebag on his back; and the trees have kept on growing of themselves, while I was away. I do n't know how I'll go through it all and not die, for I should n't like to die just now. I want to walk about with my child. Oh dear, good Hansei, do n't give her a step-mother."

"Wife, wife," said Hansei, quieting her, "You're making fools of both of us. I'm quite sure that comes of your not having eaten a thing all day."

He insisted upon stopping at the next inn, where Walpurga was obliged to drink some wine. There was, indeed, wine in her chest, that is, the six bottles with silver foil, which the Doctor had sent. But she wished to take that to her mother.

Although it was in broad daylight, Walpurga fell asleep in the wagon. When she awoke, she silently took her husband's hand

in hers and held it for a long while. In the last little town this side of their village, they stopped again, in spite of Walpurga's protests. Hansei asserted that the grandmother did not expect them before the next day, and that they would find nothing to eat at home. He ordered a bounteous meal, as if he were laying in a supply for several days. Walpurga fell to heartily, and at last they quite forgot themselves, for Doctor Kumpan entered the inn. He was quite affable towards Walpurga and drank heartily with Hansei. He then called him aside and enjoined him to treat his wife considerably.

When they, at last, got into the wagon, half of the town had gathered about the inn, in order to have a look at the crown prince's nurse. Doctor Kumpan ordered the postilion, who was not in uniform, to take his post-horn with him, and the handsome, dark-eyed, lively fellow, blew his horn while they drove through the little town and along the road. The merry echoes resounded from the mountains and through the forests. Walpurga was almost ashamed to drive in this style, while the people were at work along the road; but Hansei felt a childish delight in the sound of the horn.

At last they caught a glimpse of the lake. Evening was already setting in.

"Those are swallows from home," said Walpurga. "The next village is ours. I see the church, and—hark! I hear the bells! I hear them with you, my child, and soon you'll hear them, in my arms; and your voice—your voice— Coachman, drive faster; no, drive gently; drive just as you please, so that we do n't upset. Stop here; we'll get out now. Stop! I tell you." She alighted, but as soon as she had done so, she exclaimed: "No, I'll get in again. We'll get home sooner if we ride. But why do n't mother and the child come out to meet me?"

"She thinks we won't be home till to-morrow," cried Hansei.

"Then may be she is n't at home at all, and has gone off with the child to visit some neighbor."

"May be so; but I think not."

"Do n't you see a child there, running across the road? Is that it? Is it?"

"No, that's not our child. It can't run yet; but it can crawl about like a young dog."

"Who cut down the willow?" suddenly asked Walpurga.

"It was blown down by the storm, last spring."

Walpurga asked questions, but heeded not what she asked nor the answers she received. "Just see, how clear the brook is, and how swiftly it flows. I think it never used to flow so quickly. And they've built a new house here, and there they've felled the trees, and, just look at the beautiful little water wagtails. They're larger and more beautiful with us than anywhere else."

They met a boy on a grey mare which he was riding to water.

"That's Grubersepp's Waldl. How stout he's growing!"

"And it's a good beginning, that the first one to meet us should be a boy," said Hansei. "Waldl!" he called out to the lad, "come over to our house this evening and I'll give you some cherries." The boy made no reply and rode on.

"The two cows grazing there near the little girl, are ours," said Hansei.

Everything comes; everything except the mother and the child.

"Mother's at home," cried Walpurga, suddenly. "Mother's at home. I see smoke rising from our chimney; and there she stands by the fire with the child on her arms. Oh mother! Oh child! How is it possible that you do n't notice anything? I'm coming! I'm here! I'm home! I'm coming!"

The wagon stopped before the house.

"Mother! Child!" cried Walpurga from the depths of her heart. The mother came out of the house, with the child on her arm.

Walpurga embraced her mother and kissed her child, but it cried and would not go to her.

Walpurga went into the room and sat down beside the stove. Her hands were folded on her lap, and she was weeping. She looked about her as if she were in a strange world.

"Leave her to herself for a little while; give her a breathing spell," said the grandmother to Hansei, who had gone out of the house, and who, with the driver's assistance, had been unloading the chests.

It was but a short time that Walpurga remained in the room, a prey to sad thoughts. The sun stood high over the opposite mountains, its rays making every blade of grass in the garden glitter like burnished gold. The mountains in the west were all aglow with light, and those opposite were reflected half-way across the lake. The day had been one of great excitement to Walpurga. What she had hoped for was now realized. There was nothing more to come. She felt as if she must start off again, as if she must be up and doing. And then it suddenly occurred to her that it was wrong to remain sitting there alone, while her mother and her child were out of doors, and that it was almost a crime to pass a moment away from them.

She went into the kitchen. The grandmother, with the child on her arm, was standing by the hearth in which there was a bright fire.

"Does my child eat broth?" asked Walpurga. Attracted by the voice, the child stared at her; but, as soon as Walpurga fixed her glance upon it, it nestled closer to its grandmother, as if to hide itself.

"Yes, indeed. It eats anything, and is just like you. You did

so, too. It would like to take a spoon and help itself, but it can't find its mouth. I'm making soup for you, you must eat something warm."

Walpurga's looks became more cheerful. The grandmother soon brought her some soup. Walpurga ate it and said :

"Ah, mother; the first soup I eat at home. Nothing on earth tastes like it. They can't make such soup as this at the palace."

The grandmother smiled, and stroked Walpurga's head with her hand, as if blessing her. She felt that Walpurga's joy at being home again, affected her every thought and action.

"The home soup—yes, indeed," said she at last, and smiled; and, moved thereto by the grandmother's cheerful looks, the child laughed, too.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

THE soft glimmer of early dawn stole through the heart-shaped opening in the shutters of their little room. Down by the reedy bank the water-ousel piped its matin song. Walpurga awoke, and listened to the breathing of her husband and child. Her life, now, is a threefold breath.

"Good morrow, day. I'm home again," said she, softly. She felt so happy at the thought of being in her own bed. Suddenly, she folded her hands and said:

"I thank Thee, Lord! Now I know how it must be to wake in heaven and feel as if home were reached at last, to have all your loved ones with you, to know that parting's at an end, and that all will remain together forever. Now we'll live happily, in kindness and in righteousness. Grant us all good health, and put all evil away from us."

She closed her eyes and indulged in retrospection. Last night, the grandmother had beckoned her to follow her into the little grassy garden back of the house. When they reached there, her mother had said: "Look up to those stars and tell me: Can you still kiss your husband and your child, with pure lips? If—God forbid—it be otherwise—"

"Mother!" Walpurga had cried. "Mother, I can. I raise my hand and call God to bear me witness, I am just as I was when I left home."

Said the mother: "That makes me happy. Now I'm content to die."

"No, mother; let's live together in happiness for many years to come."

"I'm content. And now let me give you a piece of advice; and mind what I tell you. You've been out in the wide world for nearly a year. You've been riding about in carriages, while I've been here in the cottage and garden, taking care of your child. But, for all that, my thoughts went out into the world, and far beyond, where coach and four never get to. Now listen to me and obey me."

"Yes, mother; with all my heart."

"Then mind what I tell you. Give yourself time to get used to things again, and don't ask for anything out of reason. You can't

expect your child to love you yet. You've been away from it so long that it does n't know you, and has become estranged. And so you must expect to find it with everything else. Your husband's been alone for nearly a year; his lot has been much harder than yours."

Here they were interrupted. Hansei called from the window and asked them what they were doing out there so late, in the dark.

"And now go to sleep," said the mother. "I've had your bed aired these three days. Sleep well. Good night."

The mother led her daughter by the hand as if she were a little child, and when they had passed the threshold, she fell upon Walpurga's neck and hugged and kissed her in the dark.

Walpurga had closed her eyes, and, in thought, recalled all that had happened during the preceding night. Everything seemed double, just as with the stars that are reflected in the lake at night, making it seem as if there were two skies, one above and one in the waters below.

At the thought of the lake, Walpurga arose, quietly dressed herself, bent over her child and husband for a moment, softly opened the door, left the room, and went out of the house. She passed through the garden. The air was filled with the fragrance of the elder bushes in the hedge. The finch on the cherry tree warbled merrily, and she would fain have called out to him: "Be quiet; wake no one till I return."

She passed on. From the reedy banks of the lake, where the water-ousel and the reed-sparrow were chirping their song, there flew up a flock of wild ducks, twittering while on the wing.

The sun rose, and the whole lake shone as if a softly undulating golden mantle had been spread over it.

Walpurga looked about her in all directions, and then, undressing herself in a trice, jumped into the lake. She dived and rose again, brushed her hair from her face and plashed about, as happy as if she were a fish at the bottom of the lake. The golden mantle of the lake assumed a purple hue, and Walpurga looked up at the purple sun, and over the glowing lake. "Thus it is," said she, "and thus it's right. I'm here again and yours again, and everything else is put away from me. I've never been away." Under the clustering willows, she hurriedly dressed herself, and felt so happy and cheerful that it cost her an effort to refrain from singing aloud. Blue and green dragon flies hovered over the water. Swallows were flying over the lake and dipping their bills into the waters which were gradually acquiring a paler hue, and from yonder forest resounded the cuckoo's note. A stork among the reeds seemed to watch Walpurga while she dressed herself. She noticed the bird rattling its great bill and waved it away. She hurried back to the house. The finch in the cherry tree was still warb-

ling its morning song, the two cows in the stable were lowing, but everything else about the house was still wrapped in silence. For a long while, Walpurga stood gazing at the flowers on the window sill, and was delighted with the fragrance of the pinks and the rose-mary. She had planted them while still a child, and before she had had a garden of her own. All the earth that she could then call her own, was contained in these flower pots. Now she was able to buy many a broad field, but who could say whether they would give her as much joy as she now derived from these dingy, broken pots.

It seemed as if the pinks had purposely blossomed, in honor of the return of her who had planted and cared for them. There were scarcely any buds left, but even these few were putting out their little red tongues. Walpurga returned to her pinks again and again, and could not get enough of their fragrance. Suddenly, she laughed to herself at the thought of an old story that her mother had told her about blessed Susanna, who, when hungry and thirsty, could satisfy herself by smelling a flower. "Yes, but that would n't satisfy my folks," said she with a smile, and went back into the house.

Mother, husband and child were still asleep. Walpurga sat by the cradle for a little while. Then she went out to the kitchen, and kindled the first fire on her own hearth. Silently she watched at the rising flame, while the sounds of the matin bell of the chapel by the lake fell on her ear. She pressed both hands firmly against her heart, as if to hold fast the happiness with which it was overflowing.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT! at work already?" said Hansei, entering the kitchen, and bearing in his arms the child, whose only garment was its little shirt.

"Good morning! Good morning to both of you," exclaimed Walpurga, with joyful voice. Her every tone and every word seemed to say that she could feed and satisfy them all with her love.

"Good morning, my child!" said she. The baby stretched out its arms towards her, but, when she offered to take it, turned its back on her and laid its head upon Hansei's shoulder.

"Have patience with it; it does n't know you right yet," said Hansei; "after all, such a young child is just like an animal, and do n't know its mother if she's been living away from it."

As if to refute Hansei's humiliating philosophy, the child turned round again, stared at the fire, pursed up its little mouth, and blew just as when one does when blowing the fire.

"Grandmother taught her that," said Hansei. "It can do lots

of other clever things. Grandmother never ~~was~~ so late as she does to-day. She seems to feel that she's no longer obliged to draw the cart all by herself. No one 'll grudge her to her. There never was a better woman in all the wide world, than your mother."

"Never was! is n't she so still?" asked Walpurga, in alarm.

Her mother had been so unutterably happy yesterday. Who knows but what her joy had killed her? They had been so happy that perhaps misfortune must come, for nothing is perfect in this world.

Walpurga trembled with fear while these thoughts flashed through her mind.

"I'll go look after mother," said she, and went to her room. Hansei followed, carrying the child on his arm. And now, when the mother awoke, she said: "Well, and so they have to awaken me. Am I still a young girl who sleeps late and dreams when the elder flower is in blossom? Yes, now I remember my dream. I dreamt that I was young again and was a servant at the farm on the other side of the mountains, and that your father came. It was on a Sunday, and he and I went off together to my brother's, in the pitch hut. We were standing by the brook where the elder grows, and father was on the other side, reaching out his hand to me, so that I could jump across, when you woke me. I can feel his hand in mine yet."

"God be praised that you're awake again," interposed Walpurga. The mother smiled and continued:

"And now, Walpurga, I've only one thing to ask of you. If you do n't mind doing so, give me a florin or two. I'd like to go home once more, to the place where I was born and was in service, and where my brother lives; and I would like to have a few pence about me, to give to the poor people who are still there."

"Yes, mother; you shall have all you want. We've plenty, thank God."

"I'd like to know," said the mother, "why I dreamt of my home last night."

"That's plain enough," said Hansei. "A few days ago, when the wood-carver from your village was here, they were saying that the owner of the freehold farm there would like to sell his place. But who's got money enough to buy that?"

"You see," said the old woman to Walpurga, "what a heretic and believer in dreams your husband has become. He learned all that from the innkeeper. And now give me the child and hurry out of here. Come, you little chamois-kid, jump about and dance."

She sang to the child, and it stretched forth its arms towards her, just like a bird glad to return to its nest.

Hansei and Walpurga left the room. The child lay beside the grandmother, and the two were quite happy together.

"And now I'll milk the cow," said Hansei.

"You?"

"Yes. Who else? Mother can't do everything."

"No; let me do that now."

Walpurga went out to the stable with her husband; she wanted to relieve him of the task, but it would not do, and Hansei said:

"There's no need of it, either; that'll all soon be different. When you become landlady, we'll have two servants, at least, and they can see to the milking. We'll have room for six cows besides our own, and will be entitled to have as many more on the mountain meadow. Then you can make butter and cheese, and do what you like."

Hansei seemed to be talking to the cow. He did not care to see what sort of a face his wife would make. But now she had, at all events, heard of the matter, and they could talk it over, afterward.

Walpurga was about to reply, when the stable door opened, and a girl entered, carrying a cake on a large platter. She removed the cloth with which it was covered, and said:

"My master, the landlord of the Chamois, sends this with his kind greetings, and his welcome to the wife."

"You silly thing!" exclaimed Hansei, jumping to his feet, and looking quite oddly with the milk pail buckled fast to him. "You silly thing! People don't carry cakes into a stable. Take it into the room, and when you get home, give them my best thanks, and tell the innkeeper, our godfather, to honor us with a visit soon—no, we'll come to see him this forenoon; and now you may go."

Walpurga remembered that her mother advised her not to attempt to change things at once. She determined, for the present, to listen to everything, and let affairs go on in their own way, keeping her eyes open in the meanwhile. Time would show how the land lay.

Hansei went on milking the cows, and Walpurga said nothing. "One can't always have the world all to one's self, the way it was down at the lake this morning; but while there's such a bustle about my ears, I must keep my own counsel," thought she.

When Hansei had finished milking, and stood there with a pail in each hand, he said:

"What do you think of it?"

"It's splendid milk; and there's lots of it, too."

"No, I mean what do you think of the landlord of the Chamois?"

"It's very polite of him, and I'm much obliged to him for it. We must try to get even with him."

"There's no need of that; we'll have to pay dear enough for the cake. But we're not so stupid, either. You'll soon see, Walpurga, I know which side my bread's buttered on, as well as he does. Yes," continued Hansei; "if I'd only had a chance to talk

to the king, you'd have soon found out that Hansei's not the dullest fellow in the world."

"I knew that long ago. I do n't need the king to tell me that."

At breakfast, Walpurga was delighted to find that the child would take a few spoonfuls of porridge from her; but it would not go to her, and cried as if its heart would break, when she tried to take it.

"Have you counted up all we're worth? Of all the money you sent, not one penny's been taken. That is, I took fifteen florins to buy me a rifle."

"That was right," said Walpurga. And with all her confidence in him, she resolved that she would not hand Hansei the money that Irma had given her on the day she left the palace. She knew not why, but she felt a dread of the gold that had come to her in so strange a manner. She had not yet looked at it herself. Besides, she felt that it might be well to keep something in reserve for a rainy day. It might be better if all were not displayed at once. She promised to reckon it all up before noon, and expressed her regret that she had no closet in which to pack away all the pretty things she had brought with her in the chest.

"I would n't unpack at all, if I were you," said Hansei. "You might as well wait till we have our inn. You'll find enough chests and trunks there."

Walpurga made no answer. Hansei looked at her curiously, but she remained silent.

"Why do n't you say something about the matter?" he enquired at last.

"Because you have n't told me about it right. Come now, what do you really mean?"

Hansei informed her that every one said the most sensible thing he could do would be to buy out the landlord of the Chamois. There could n't be a better hostess in the world than Walpurga, and they would have a larger custom than any house in the land. They could alter the sign—that would be a clever stroke and would draw more than anything else. It should no longer be "The Chamois," but the "The King's Nurse," or "The Prince's Nurse," instead. There was a painter thereabouts, who would make a new sign, representing Walpurga with the prince in her arms. People would be drawn together from all parts of the neighborhood; there would n't be tables and chairs enough, and money would pour in on them from all sides. The bargain was a fair one; the innkeeper had named a reasonable price. "Every one says so," said Hansei, "and now what have you to say? for it's for you to decide."

"I do n't care for what the people say," began Walpurga, "but tell me, frankly, have you concluded the purchase? If you have, I've nothing to say. I would n't have you break your word nor

disgrace yourself, for all the world. You're the husband and your word must be kept."

"That's right; if only every one could have heard that."

"What need you care whether they hear it or not?"

"Why, the stupid people think that you rule everything, because the money comes from you. To be frank with you, the bargain is n't concluded; it all depends upon your consent."

"And if I were to say 'no,' would you be angry? Answer me; why are you silent now?"

"Well, it would grieve me to the heart if you did."

"I do n't say 'no,'" answered his wife, soothingly. "But there's one thing we'd better have an understanding about, at once. I never want to hear another word as to where the money comes from. You were alone all that time; you've had to suffer for it, as well as I, and, take my word for it, I sha n't forget it. But, as I told you before, I do n't say 'no.' We're husband and wife and will talk over and settle everything together. If the money's to bring discord, I'd rather throw the whole of it into the lake, and myself in after it."

Walpurga wept, and Hansei, with choking voice, said: "For God's sake, do n't weep. I feel as if my heart would break when you cry. I would n't have you cry, no, not for ten inns. Oh Lord! to cry on the very first morning! Depend on it, nothing shall be done, unless you're perfectly satisfied."

Walpurga held out her hand to him, and, with the other, wiped away the tears which had relieved her overflowing heart. They heard visitors approaching. Walpurga hurried to the bedroom, for she would have no one see that she had been weeping. While in the room, she put the gold that Irma had given her into a pillow case, and then hid it. One piece of the money had dropped on the floor. She picked it up and looked at the image of the king stamped upon it. "Such a king's head goes everywhere," said she. "If he could only be everywhere in thought, so as to set everything to rights. But that's more than any man can do. God alone can do that— How are they getting on in the palace? What will become of them all? Is it only a day since I left there?"

Lost in reverie, Walpurga remained in the room for a long while. At last, with a deep sigh, she awakened to the fact that, in this world, no one can afford to give all his thoughts to others. It was now her duty to take care of herself. Various neighbors and friends dropped in to welcome Walpurga. Hansei, who was all impatience, said that she had just gone to her room and would return in a little while. At last Walpurga came, radiant with joy and health. They all expressed themselves delighted to see her looking so well, spoke of the excellent reputation she enjoyed, and assured her that they took as much pleasure in her good fortune as if it were their own.

Walpurga thanked them heartily. The great cake which the innkeeper had sent was soon eaten up, for she offered some of it to every visitor.

"How goes it with old Zenza?" asked Walpurga.

"Just to think how good she is; she even remembers the old torment. Yes, your kindness was thrown away on her and her offspring," said several voices. She was soon informed that Zenza, with her son and Black Esther, had left the neighborhood. No one knew where they had gone, but the root-hut on the Windenreuthe now stood empty.

Nor did troops of beggars from the village and the neighboring country fail to present themselves. It must have been quickly noised about that Walpurga had returned, bringing a whole chestful of gold with her.

Walpurga was astonished to learn how many relations she had in the neighborhood. Many claimed relationship with her father, but were unable to state exactly in what degree, and some of the beggars, who disputed each other's claims, were soon involved in quarrels with each other. Walpurga dispensed modest gifts to all of them. They left in an ill humor. What they had received had hardly been worth the trouble of going for it, and the highways and byways resounded with imprecations launched against Walpurga who, they said, had become proud and stingy. But there were soon fresh troops of beggars. It was like scattering wheat among sparrows; more were constantly coming.

"Take your whip and drive the whole pack of beggars away," suddenly cried a loud voice from the road.

It was the innkeeper, accompanied by his two dogs, Dachsel and Wachsel, who added their voices to that of their master, until at last a beggar gave one of the dogs a kick that sent him off yelping. The innkeeper now swore more violently than before, but Walpurga went out and, in quite a determined tone, requested him not to interfere, and then doubled her gifts to all of them. She thus escaped a confidential and patronizing familiarity on the part of the innkeeper. She was, as yet, uncertain how she ought to behave towards him. He was evidently Hansei's seducer. If she were to show herself angry at him at the start, it might lead to much vexation and would destroy all her influence. On the other hand, she found it difficult to force herself to greet him in a friendly manner.

When he had entered the room, he asked Hansei:

"Have you told her everything?"

"Of course."

"And is she agreed?"

"She says she'll be satisfied with anything I do."

Walpurga came into the room, and with the words: "Welcome, and many congratulations to the hostess of the Chamois," the innkeeper extended his hand to her.

"Thanks for the first; but, before I accept the second, my husband must be landlord of the Chamois."

"Heigho!" exclaimed the innkeeper, "how clever! how studied! how dignified and polite! Look here, Hansei! have n't I always told you that you've got a wife who might be a queen?"

"And why not, if my husband were a king?"

The innkeeper's fist descended on the table, and he laughed so heartily at this clever sally, that his two dogs began to bark and thus accompanied his laughter with their applause. He showed the other visitors that it would not do to weary their hosts. He left soon afterward, the rest of the company going with him.

CHAPTER III.

"AND for your mother I'll build a snug room looking towards the garden, where she can take her comfort. I always knew it before, but it was n't till you were away, that I found out what a treasure she is to us. If the Lord only lets us keep her with us for many a year to come. Yes, your mother shall have the best room in the house."

Thus spake Hansei, with gleeful countenance. Walpurga enquired: "Where do you mean to build?"

Hansei looked around as if to express his surprise at her asking such a question. He had yielded so far as to promise that nothing should be done without his wife's consent. He thought that this was all that could in reason be expected of him, and that it was best to finish up the business at once.

With great self-command, he said:

"Why, at our inn, to be sure. I shan't do anything to this tumble-down cottage. But I've already told them that they must n't disturb the nut tree. You'll be surprised when you see how full it is. We shall get three measures of nuts this year, and a nut year is a good one for boys."

Walpurga clapped her hand to his mouth and, with downcast eyes, said: "You're a dear good fellow; but, believe me, I know you better than you do yourself. I'm glad that you're much sharper than you used to be. I often used to tell you not to be so bashful and forever keeping in the background. You've so much common sense; more, indeed, than all the rest of them. If you could only have been behind the door, when I told the queen about you; and she promised me faithfully that she'll come to see us when she visits the mountains next year."

Hansei complacently swallowed the praise that his wife bestowed upon him, and kept on smiling to himself for some time afterward.

Husband and wife praised and extolled each other—a custom more honored in the breach than the observance, at least among peasants, who would feel ashamed if they knew of it. Their com-

ing together after so long a separation, seemed like a new wooing and wedding. The question of the purchase of the inn, prevented them, however, from fully realizing this and even threatened to imperil their domestic happiness.

"So you're agreed that we'll be host and hostess of the Chamois?" enquired Hansei.

"I've told you, already, that we'd talk it over; and so you think you'll make a good landlord?"

"Not so good a landlord as you will a landlady. That's what everybody says; and the landlady's always the chief point. You'd be the best landlady, for you can earn your bread with your tongue, just as the parson does; and that'll help us to get a penny or two more for our wine and everything else. You've got a way of looking right into people's hearts, and can give and take, and that's the best sign that you're made to be a landlady."

Hansei did not understand how Walpurga could still hesitate. The highest ideal of the young mountaineer is to be an innkeeper; to supply every one with meat and drink, and to live by the profits of it; to give feasts and, at the same time, be the merriest one at them; to receive money while others spend it; to have his house the rendezvous of all, no matter how varied their pursuits and interests; to be the helper and adviser of every one; the man with whom all keep on good terms, who knows all that is going on, all about bargains and prices, and who, like the lord of the manor in the olden time, receives a profit whenever cow, or farm, or house change hands. And, besides, what others eat and drink tickles his palate, too, and he does n't grow thin upon it. And then, like the parson, he would derive profit from baptisms, marriages and funerals; to say nothing of the strangers who would come during the summer and would be obliged to pay tribute to the landlord, because the mountains are so high and the lake so deep, and because he allows them to see it all. Yes, an inn is like a great lake—all the little streams that flow from the different mountain rills concentrate there.

Walpurga stared at her husband in surprise, while she listened to his animated and yet detailed description of the advantages of innkeeping. She almost felt inclined to favor his plan, and thought to herself: "Perhaps it would be the most sensible thing after all; for I'll never feel quite at home again in the old, narrow ways of life that I once used to lead. I've grown different, and must have something different." Frankly and sincerely, she again assured him that she was not opposed to the project, but that it would be well to go about it cautiously.

"And do you know what's best of all?" asked Hansei. "We're to have a post-office here—the judge himself says so—and if it should fail us, you could easily bring it about. You'll give the village a great name. Indeed, you'll make a town of it, and the houses will be worth twice as much as they now are."

He wanted his wife to go up to the village with him at once, in order to look at the inn; but Walpurga said:

"Let me get a good rest in our old house before we go up there. The inn won't run away. I can't tell you how happy I am to be in our house again. I feel as if I must try every chair. Everything seems so good at home. It's just as if every chair and every table had eyes, and was looking at me and saying: 'Yes, we still know you, and have waited for you;' and now, I beg of you, do let me rest awhile."

"Yes, yes; just stay," replied Hansei, walking up and down the room. Suddenly, as if called by some one, he went out and split several logs which he had laid aside.

Walpurga came out and looked at him with evident satisfaction.

"Yes," said he, "work will be kept up just as it always was. I shan't be a lazy landlord—rest assured of that; and I won't take to drinking, either. Are you going up to the village with me?" he enquired at last.

"Yes: but do come in."

Hansei was soon on the road, and was not a little proud to be seen entering the village with his wife. At the fountain near the townhall, there were women and girls with their tubs. As soon as they saw Walpurga, they came up to her and offered their greetings and congratulations.

The children were just leaving school. Walpurga called several of them to her, shook hands with them, and gave them kind messages to their parents. With saddened heart, she would hear of the death of such and such a one. The other children were gathered in groups, and would stand about, staring at her with surprise. Walpurga's being sent for and taken to the palace had been as a fairy-tale to the village children; and now the fairy herself was standing there in broad daylight, and talking just as other people did.

At last Walpurga left them, but the children kept calling out her name, in order to prove that they still knew her.

When she and her husband walked on, the latter pointed towards the townhall. "Look!" said he, "I'll soon be there, too. It's almost certain that they'll elect me as one of the town council. I might even become a burgomaster. But I won't take that, for that would get an innkeeper into lots of trouble."

Walpurga observed that the idea of becoming a host had taken deep root in Hansei. She simply replied: "I find that you've seen a great deal of the world this year, but you must certainly have learned that it's every one's duty to care for his own, and that when one's poor and unfortunate, no one lends a helping hand."

"Certainly; but thank God! we do n't need any one now; quite the contrary."

They were passing the house of Grubersepp, the wealthy farmer

and, indeed, the richest man in the community. He was a tall, lean man, whose features always wore a sour expression. He was standing on the steps before his house, and Hansei greeted him civilly. Grubersepp, however, turned on his heel and walked off towards the stable. It would not do for a rich farmer like him to welcome a day laborer's child like Walpurga. The whole village might make fools of themselves on her account, but a rich farmer like Grubersepp knows his own importance too well. It would be mighty fine, indeed, if he were known to trouble himself about a creature who used to be glad if he would let her have a pint or two of milk on trust.

Hansei cried out aloud: "Good day, Grubersepp! my wife's come back again."

Grubersepp acted as if he had not heard him, and went towards the stable.

The joy that Walpurga had experienced while receiving the greetings of the villagers was not enough to compensate her for her pain at the slight thus put upon her. After all, it was only a silly, narrow-minded farmer displaying his stupid peasant pride. Had n't the king spoken to her, and had he ever spoken to such a dolt as he? But this did not satisfy her. Grubersepp was the first in the village, and to be slighted by him, or to incur his ill will, was no trifling matter after all.

"I'll never be hostess to you, you old pitchfork," said Walpurga, looking towards the house; "I'll never pour out a glass of wine for you and say, 'God bless you!' with it."

"What are you saying?" said Hansei, as Walpurga uttered these words to herself.

"If we could buy that silly old pitchfork's land, I'd like it much better than the inn," she answered.

"Of course, that would be much finer; but we have n't enough money for that; and, even if we had, Grubersepp would n't sell. On the contrary, when a poor man has his eye on a field, he buys it up before he gets a chance at it."

When Hansei and Walpurga arrived at the inn, they found quite a crowd there. A new purchase of wine had just been opened, and, as usual on such occasions, the drinking was at the host's expense.

"Ah! here comes the new landlady," exclaimed several voices.

"Thank you," said Walpurga, "my husband has n't concluded the bargain yet."

The hunter from Zell was there also, and Walpurga saw, at a glance, that her husband was caught in a net of flatterers. She soon got out of the room. The host and his wife showed her and Hansei through all the rooms and the cellars. Walpurga found it all very good, but kept saying that they would have to build and arrange everything anew.

"You're spoiled," said the innkeeper. "Here in the country, things are different from what they are in your palace. You seem to forget that one need n't drive a nail into this house for the next fifty years." Walpurga would not permit herself to be drawn into any discussion of the subject. On the way home, she remarked to her husband, that it would be well to have the house examined by some one who knew all about building matters, for neither of them understood anything about it, and to make anything out of the innkeeper, was like drawing blood from a stone.

Hansei was vexed that the bargain had not been concluded on the spot. He felt as if he could not remain in the old house another hour. Walpurga, on the other hand, wished to stave off the matter for awhile. Besides that, as Hansei was obliged to admit, she suggested many points that required careful consideration.

That afternoon, Walpurga reckoned up all that belonged to her. It was a handsome amount. There was almost enough to pay for the inn, with the fields, meadows and woods belonging to it. One or two prosperous years would enable them to clear off the mortgage which they might be obliged to leave remaining on the property.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was evening. The grandmother was in the room and, in a tremulous voice, was singing her granddaughter to sleep. She, too, was singing the song:

Oh, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee.

Walpurga and Hansei were the only ones at the table and he could scarcely eat the potatoes as fast as she pared them. She would always put the best and finest before him. "Just think of it, Hansei," said she, looking so happy while she spoke; "the best things in the world—sleep, sunlight, water, eggs, boiled potatoes and salt—are all the same in the palace and in the cottage. The king and the queen can't have them better than we, and the very best of all is the same everywhere. And do you know what it is?"

"Yes; a good kiss. It would n't be any better from the queen's lips than from yours; and there I'm like the king, too, especially when I'm as nicely shaved as to-day," he added, taking his wife's hand and passing it over his smooth chin.

"You're right; but I did n't mean to say it that way. Love's the same, too. It can't be different up there from what it is here."

"I do n't know what's come over you," said Hansei. "I never thought you were such a witch, so clever and so wide awake. It

provokes me that people should be so familiar with you, and treat you as if you were still the same old Walpurga."

"You ought to be glad that I'm still the same, or else I should n't be your wife."

Hansei stopped chewing the potato that was in his mouth and stared at his wife in surprise. At last he hurriedly bolted down the potato and said: "Now that joke do n't please me at all. It's wrong to joke about such things." Both were silent.

In the next room sat the mother singing:

My heart doth bear a burden,
And thou hast placed it there;

And the song seemed to touch them both.

"I've got something to tell you," said Hansei, at last. "It's been my habit, for the last year, to go up to the Chamois after supper, and especially on Saturday evenings. Sometimes I've taken a drop, and sometimes not; and as this is Saturday and as they'll all be there, I think I'd better go up once more, just for your sake."

"For my sake?"

"Yes, for fear the people might say: 'Now he's got to duck under, for his gracious wife has come home'."

"Why do you always worry about what the people say? Suppose they were to say: 'What sort of a man is this? His wife was gone for a year, and on the second night after her return, he runs off to the inn?'"

Hansei, unable to parry this thrust, stared at her in surprise. At last he said: "I think I'll go, after all. You won't think hard of it, will you?"

"Go, if you like," replied Walpurga, and Hansei hurried off. Walpurga looked after him, while her eyes filled with tears. "Is this what I've so longed for?" thought she to herself. "Was it for this that I thought the minutes would never end, and felt as if I must chase the hours away?"

Her mother came in and, gently closing the door, said: "She sleeps sweetly."

The ruddy glow of the rosy setting sun illumined Walpurga's countenance, in which, it was plainly to be seen, a great change had taken place since that sun rose.

The child again began to cry. The grandmother went in to it, and Walpurga stealthily hurried in the direction of the lake. It was night. The waves were softly beating on the shore; the reed-sparrow was still chattering, and the water-hens kept up their twittering. Far up on the mountain, bright fires were burning; for it was Saturday night, and the mountain lasses were looking out for their swains. And now the moon rose over the summit of the Chamois hill and shone upon the lake. Walpurga, as if lost

in reverie, stood there, for some time, gazing into the lake. Then she turned towards home, but, instead of going into the room, quietly stole into the cellar. With almost superhuman strength, she moved the stone cabbage-tub from its place, dug a hole in the ground, placed the money that Irma had given her in it, and shoved the cabbage-tub back into its place again.

She was washing her hands at the pump, when she noticed that her mother was lighting the lamp in the room. She went in, staring at the light.

"Why do you stare at the light so?" asked her mother.

"Well, mother, I'm not used to a single light any more; in the palace, there are ever so many."

"But the people there have only one pair of eyes," replied the mother. "No, my child; that's not why you look so troubled. Tell me honestly, what's the matter?"

Walpurga frankly confessed that it almost broke her heart to think that her husband could not stay at home on the second evening after her return, but must go to the inn.

"Give me your hand," said the mother. "Yes, I've been thinking about your hands. I've noticed that you wash them whenever you've touched anything. That's very nice, but it won't do here. Your hand's become soft and tender this last year, while mine's as hard as leather; and you'll soon have to harden your hands, too. For God's sake, don't make your husband skittish, and don't give him an ugly word. Take my word for it, he could not help going up there to-night, and it's Saturday night besides. It was just as if six horses were dragging him. He's got used to it, and habits are strong things that can't be changed at will. He's not bad; I'm sure of that. Let him have his own way, just as he's used to, and he'll soon be all right again."

Walpurga made no answer. She busied herself paring potatoes for her mother, who went on to say:

"The things that are God's gifts we have just as good as they have them in the palace."

"There! we've saved one poor soul," replied Walpurga with a smile, "I said the very same words to Hansei, a little while ago."

When they had finished paring the potatoes for the next day, the mother said:

"I'll tell you what. Let's close the front door, and sit on the little seat your father was so fond of, in the grassy garden back of the house. There we can talk to each other without being disturbed, and, as the lights are out, we'll have no visitors. Nor do we want any, for we're enough by ourselves."

"Oh God! if only my husband felt so, too."

"Let him alone at the inn. Thank God that we're alone together. Do not act like a deposed queen; it only makes it so much the harder for you."

Mother and daughter went out through the back door that led to the little garden, where they seated themselves on a bench which stood against the well and opposite the stable window, and left the back door ajar so that they might hear the child if it should cry. They heard nothing, however, except the noise made by the cows while feeding. The moon was high, and the shimmering surface of the lake reflected its rays. Now and then, the *yodel* of some distant mountaineer, the barking of a dog, or the soft plashing of an oar, were the only sounds that broke the silence.

"If the first two weeks were only over," said Walpurga, "I'd be better used to it."

"Do n't wish for time to pass. It comes and goes of itself."

"Yes, mother; tell me everything I'm to do, I do n't care to have my own will now."

"That won't do, either. Those who can walk alone must fall alone."

"I'll try to do my best."

"Very well. Tell me one thing: how is it in the palace about now?"

"About now? Dear me, it seems two years since I left there. By this time, the lamps have been lit in all the passage ways, and down stairs, where the king and the queen are, they're just about leaving the table. But we have nothing to do with that. Made-moiselle Kramer is reading her book. She reads a book through every day; and my prince. O you poor child—"

Walpurga burst into tears. At the same moment, her own child began to cry and the two women hurried in.

"It was only dreaming," said the mother softly. "The child must feel that the right mother is come."

Walpurga again felt conscious of the double life she was leading.

Although she was at home, her thoughts were still at the palace. Everything seemed confused and indistinct, and when she found herself again sitting on the bench at her mother's side, she was obliged to stop and consider where she was.

"It seems to me," said the mother, "that those who possess so many worldly gifts as the king and queen and the quality have, can't take much time to think of the heavenly life hereafter."

Walpurga told her how pious they all were at court, and that the queen, although a Protestant, was especially so.

They conversed with each other in calm and gentle tones. Walpurga rested her head against her mother's heart and, at last, fell asleep there. The mother held her in her embrace, scarcely venturing to breathe, lest she might waken her. After they had been sitting there awhile, she awakened Walpurga and told her that she might catch cold and had better go to bed. Walpurga scarcely knew where she was and, while still rubbing her eyes, she asked: "Is n't my husband home yet?"

"Just go to bed, I'll help you," said the mother, and she undressed Walpurga, as if she were a little child. Then she sat down by the bed and, taking her daughter's hand in hers, said: "You see, it's a queer thing when people who belong together have lived apart for a long time. They've become used to getting along without each other, and the only thing to do, is to wait till they grow used to each other again. Take precious good care that you never speak an unkind word, and don't dare to think to yourself: 'If I only were away again, and out in the world.' If you harbor such thoughts, you'll be like a tree cut off at its roots and transplanted—it must die. Mind what I tell you! Whenever you can change anything according to your own notion, do so; but you'd better not attempt to alter what can't be altered. Make up your mind that it's got to be as it is, and submit. There's nothing so silly, in all the world, as to wish for what you can't have. When the wind blows and the rain descends, you'll often hear people say: 'If it were only fine weather to-day.' We can't change the weather outside of us; but we can see to it that there's fair weather inside. And what I was going to say is: see that you have fair weather within yourself and then all will be well."

"Yes; but what am I to do?"

"Make an effort this very night. Promise me, faithfully, that if you're awake when your husband comes home, you'll say to him, cheerfully, 'God greet you, Hansei'!"

"I can't do that, mother; indeed, I can't."

"But I tell you you must be able to do it, or else you're not a true wife and mother, and every piece of gold you've brought home with you will be as if a fiery demon were lurking in it. You promised to obey me, and at the very start you refuse."

"Yes, mother; I'll try my best."

"Well, then, good night," said the mother, and returned to her room.

Walpurga lay there in silence. Anger and sorrow kept her awake. Her child had become estranged from her, her husband had acquired bad habits and preferred the society of his comrades to hers. For whose sake had she imposed the heavy burden upon herself? For whose sake had she gone among strangers to earn all that she had brought home with her, and for whom had she kept herself so pure? She wet her pillow with bitter tears. But suddenly an inner voice said to her: "Do you mean to take credit to yourself for having been honest? Were you honest for yourself or for others? and were n't they obliged to suffer, too, in taking everything upon themselves? Ought n't you to thank God that they did n't die of grief?—Yes, that was all very well; but now they ought to be heartily glad and grateful—I can't expect it of the child, for that's too young to know; but my husband—he has sense enough, when he feels like it. And have I gained all

this only to be a hostess to the whole world? No, I've earned it, and I've a right— For God's sake! A right? There's the trouble. When the one always insists upon claiming his rights from the other, it's just like hell itself—I do n't want any rights; I've got no rights; I want nothing at all. All I wish is to be an obedient wife and a good mother— Dear Lord, assist me if I'm not one."

Heavy steps were heard approaching. Hansei entered, and, with cheerful voice, Walpurga exclaimed: "God greet you, Hansei! I'm glad that you've found me still awake."

"I've won the bet! I've won it!" exclaimed Hansei with a loud voice. "There's two men standing out there under the window. We had a wager together and I've won six measures of wine from them. They said that the best proof of a wife is the way she receives her husband when he returns from the tavern, or when he awakes her out of her sleep. I told them: 'I know my wife. When I get home, she'll be kind and friendly to me.' But they would n't believe a word of it. And so we've had a wager, and I've won it; and if all the wine in the whole world were mine, it would n't please me half so much as to know that I was right."

Hansei opened the shutters of the window towards the lake, and called out: "Now you've heard it, friends. You can go now; I've won the wine. Good night!"

Walpurga pulled the cover over her head. There was laughter outside, and the two men departed. For a minute or two, the bright moonlight shone into the lowly cottage, and then the shutter was closed again.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Hansei awoke the next morning, the cows were already milked, and the house looked so bright and clean that it seemed as if one of the kind fairies that dwelt on the mountains had been putting things to rights. A pot of blooming, scarlet pinks stood in the centre of the table, over which a neat, white cloth had been spread; and, as if to hide the dingy flower pot from view, a garland of leaves had been twined around it.

"You've been industrious," said Hansei, and Walpurga answered: "Yes, my thoughts wandered far away into the world, and have come back again. You see, the quality have all that one can wish for, but do you know what they have n't got?"

"No."

"They've no Sunday; and do you know why?"

"I do n't know that, either."

"Because they've no real workdays. In the palace, when you get up in the morning, your boots and shoes are ready at your door,

just as if they had blackened themselves. The coffee is ready of itself, the bread has baked itself, the paths have swept themselves clean, and everything is attended to, one hardly knows how. But to do everything with your own hands—Just see! to-day, I've already put my hand under your feet; I've cleaned your shoes."

"You must n't do that; that's no work for you. Do n't you do it again."

"Very well, I won't do it again. But to-day I've done everything, and I can hardly tell you how happy I felt when I went after the first pail of water. It went hard at first, but I managed it, after all. And now I'm longing for breakfast. Since the day I left home, I've never once been so hungry as I now am."

When the grandmother came, bringing the child with her, she, too, was surprised, and said: "Walpurga, you'll turn our cottage into a palace."

With joyful mien, Hansei told her of all that Walpurga had been doing, and the mother said: "She's right; an industrious home is the happiest home, and now, just because you've got some means, you must work so much the more. For where there's idleness, riches take wings to themselves; but if you're always adding something, no matter how little, to your store, the old is likely to stay."

"I do n't think we need go to church to-day," said Hansei, "mother's giving us the best benediction."

"Yes, but we'll go to church, for all that," replied Walpurga. "All the time I was away, I've looked forward to this first going to church. What a fine day it is! I do n't believe there ever was such lovely weather." Their intercourse was full of happiness. The only drawback was that the child still refused to go to Walpurga.

Walpurga told her mother that everything had been well attended to during her absence, but she was displeased at one thing.

"What is it? what have I done?"

"Why, you did n't get yourself a servant."

The old woman smiled. She could never do that. She did n't know how she could ever order a servant about. And now Hansei said he would n't allow his wife to overwork herself, and that there must be a servant in the house.

The grandmother recommended one of her brother's children from over the mountains. So it was decided that they should send word to Uncle Peter to come, and bring one of his daughters with him.

The morning was clear and bracing, and Hansei, who had put on his snow-white shirt, said, while lighting his pipe:

"Walpurga, let your mother work a little while, and come out into the garden."

He was sitting on the bench under the cherry tree. Walpurga soon joined him and, after the fashion of women, said that she could only remain for a short time, that she had various matters to attend to, and that they ought to be at church in good season.

She sat down beside him, and Hansei said: "Why don't you say something? you must have lots to tell about."

"I can't think of anything now. Just wait, it'll all come in time. It's happiness enough that we're together again. If we, all of us, only keep well. I think our cherry tree has grown."

"And now that I think of it, you've had no cherries from it this year. I'll climb up and get some for you, and if I could get up, way beyond the tree, and bring down the blue sky for you, I'd do it."

He climbed up the tree, and cried out: "Shoo! you sparrows, you've had enough. My old woman's here again, but she's a young one, still, and wants some, too. You've had your wives with you the whole year, and I have n't." He hurriedly plucked the finest cherries, singing the while:

In cherry time, you left me, dear;
In cherry time, again you're here.
The cherries they are black and red,
And I'll love my darling till I'm dead.

Suddenly he called out: "Walpurga, I must come down, I can't get any more for you, I'm so giddy."

He was soon on the ground again and said: "That never happened to me before, in all my life, and I've been up there many a half day at a time. I suppose it's our good fortune that makes me so giddy. I'll never climb a tree again, I promise you that. It would be a terrible thing if I were to fall down. We must take care that we keep well and hearty, and stick to each other. I don't want to break my legs. I want to dance with you yet. I'll dance with you at Burgei's wedding. It seems as if I could hear the music already. Hark! do n't you hear anything?"

"No. It'll be a long while before the music for Burgei's wedding is struck up."

"And she must get a good husband; I won't have it otherwise. What do you think of a prince? but I'll be quiet, for I'm talking nothing but silly stuff. I scarcely know what I'm saying, where I am, or who I am, and—"

"We're at home, and you're my husband and that's all of it. You'll see, I have something else good in store for you."

"Tell me nothing, and promise me nothing more. I've got enough already. I can hardly believe that we've a child. It seems as if we were just married."

In a soft voice, too low for any passer-by to hear it and just loud enough for them to know they were singing, they sang:

Oh, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee.
And swiftly speed the hours by,
When thou art near to me.

Just like the finch who never wearies of repeating his song, they sang the same words over and over again. They had nothing more to tell each other, for they were unspeakably happy. The church bell now began tolling. Its sounds, floating over the lake, were echoed back from the forests and mountains. A wagon was seen coming from the village and Walpurga said: "We must get ready for church."

They went into the house. The mother had already brought Hansei his royal Sunday suit. They soon heard the cracking of a whip and a voice cried out: "Are you coming?" Hansei put his head out of the window and asked: "What's the matter?" Covering herself with a large sheet, Walpurga looked out of the low window. The innkeeper's head-servant, who was standing by the wagon out in the road, answered:

"My master sends you his wagon, so that you may drive to church."

"Walpurga, do you wish to ride?" asked Hansei, at the closed chamber door.

"No, I'll walk. I beg of you, Hansei, send the wagon away; I've had enough riding." Hansei went out. At the same moment, the innkeeper, with his military medal glittering on his breast, arrived.

Hansei thanked him, but said that his wife did n't care to ride. But it was not so easy to deny the innkeeper, who waited until Walpurga came out of the house.

She was not long dressing herself, and that is saying a great deal; for this was to be her first appearance at church and she knew that all eyes would be directed upon her. When she came out, clad in tasteful attire, the innkeeper said:

"You must do me the honor of letting me drive you and your husband to church."

"I'm still quite sound on my feet, and shall be glad to have a good walk again."

"You can do that, too; but not on the first Sunday. We'd feel ashamed before the folks who live in the wilderness and out at the Windenreuthe, if we did n't show them that we know how to treat a woman like yourself with proper respect. We're all proud of you."

"Thanks. Do n't think hard of it, but I won't ride."

Walpurga was not to be moved. The innkeeper was about to give vent to his anger, but, fearing the consequences, he restrained himself and, with smiling mien, said:

"I ought to have known as much. Walking's a great treat to

the quality. Yes, indeed!" He laughed at his own cleverness and sent the wagon home again. He kept smiling till he had a chance to turn his back on Hansei and Walpurga, when his face assumed quite an angry expression. He went home, took off his coat with the medal, hung it up in the closet, and wished he could hang himself in the same manner. Who could tell but what Walpurga would interfere both with all his fun and the handsome receipts he expected that day.

Walpurga and Hansei started off by the road along the lake, the grandmother, with the child on her arm, standing at the garden hedge and looking after them. She softly repeated to the child: "mother," and it suddenly called out "mother" in a loud voice. Walpurga turned round and wanted to hug the child, but it again tried to hide from her, and cried when she attempted to kiss it. Hansei stood by, and was so vexed that he raised his hand as if to strike the child, but Walpurga pacified him and said: "We must wait."

The second bell was ringing, and they hurried on. On the way, they were joined by men, women and children coming from the village and various farms in the neighborhood. Hansei longed to drive them away, and he once said, softly, "I'd like to go with you, alone."

"Be patient," said Walpurga, "don't begrudge them their delight in our happiness." She was affable to all. Hansei looked out over the lake, then up at the sky, and then again at his wife, as if to say: "She's here again." He smiled when he heard the children saying: "She's the grandest peasant now—she comes right after the queen."

The third bell, or the ringing in, which generally lasts a full quarter of an hour, had just begun, when Hansei and his wife reached the church. Many churchgoers were standing about in groups and welcomed them. There was still time to remain there, chatting for awhile; but Walpurga took her husband's hand and went into the church with him. They were the first to enter. Walpurga took her usual seat in the place allotted to the women, and Hansei went into that assigned to the men. Thus they were together and yet apart. The bells overhead were still ringing out their merry peal, while they sat there in silent introspection. Once only did Hansei nod to his wife, but she shook her head deprecatingly. The playing of the organ began, and the people poured into church. Walpurga knew that such and such a one was near her, but she did not wish to be welcomed or greeted by any one in such a place. She felt that the eye of the Invisible One was resting upon her.

The pastor preached of the return to the everlasting home. It seemed as if his words were intended for Hansei and Walpurga; as if he were speaking only to them.

When the sermon was over and prayers were offered for the

king, the queen and the royal family, there was strange whispering in the church. Walpurga felt that all eyes were directed upon her, and did not look up.

The service was over. The congregation left the church and Walpurga was now welcomed by the late comers.

The sexton came to Walpurga and Hansei, and said that the pastor wished to see them in the vestry. They went in. The pastor again welcomed them, spoke of their good fortune and admonished them to be humble.

"Yes, yes," said Hansei, "my mother-in-law said almost the very same thing."

The pastor promised to visit them before long, and said that he was proud to have such a woman among his parishioners. Hansei put out his hand as if to check him, and felt like answering: "What's the use of your warning us against pride when you tell us such things yourself?" The pastor motioned him to be quiet, and went on to say: "I shall visit the capital next week, and you must do me the favor, Walpurga, to give me a letter to Countess von Wildenort."

"With all my heart," said Walpurga.

When they were out of doors again, Hansei looked at his wife from head to foot. And so even the pastor would ask his wife to intercede for him. Yes, she was a splendid wife, if all that could n't turn her head.

"Oh Hansei," said Walpurga suddenly, "what a pack of fools they all are. They do all they can to make one proud, and if one were to become so, they'd do nothing but abuse you."

Hansei was on the point of saying that he had thought the very same thing, but, before he had a chance to do so, he saw Schneck the tailor coming down the mountain side, and carrying his great bass viol. The weak and delicate looking man, with the great instrument on his back, presented quite an odd appearance.

"Heigho! why here's the wedding party," exclaimed the tailor, while he left the meadow path and ran up the road to shake hands with Hansei and Walpurga.

"What's the matter? what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to play for you to-day."

"For us? Who ordered you?"

"What a pity my wife did n't live to see this day. How happy it would have made her. Do n't you know about it? There's going to be a great feast at the Chamois, in honor of your return, Walpurga, and the innkeeper has engaged me and six other musicians. The forest keeper, the chief forester, all the judges of the court, and everybody for six leagues around, have been invited. How stupid that I've only got my bass viol with me, or else I'd play you a piece, right here on the road."

"There you have it," whispered Walpurga to her husband, "the

innkeeper makes money out of everything. If he only could do it, he'd have fiddle strings stretched over my back, and have the skin drawn off of you to make drum-heads with."

"Go on; we'll follow," said Hansei to the tailor. He was annoyed when others joined them on their way home. He wanted to be alone with his wife. No one should have a share of her; she belonged to him alone.

"It'll soon be a year since we sat on this pile of stones. Do you remember? It must have been somewhere about here," exclaimed Hansei, with joyous voice.

Walpurga gave an evasive answer. She told Hansei that she thought it a stupid piece of business for the innkeeper to make a festival of her return, but that she would n't put foot in the Chamois for all his music.

Hansei had not thought so ill of the projected entertainment; on the contrary, he had found pleasure in the idea of sitting in the midst of the crowd, with his wife by his side and all the people frisking about him. That was more than Grubersepp, with all his money, could get. It was not without a struggle, that he, at last, said: "Just as you please; you ought to know best whether it's proper for you."

As soon as the afternoon service was over, crowds, on their way to the Chamois, were seen hurrying through the village in carriages, on horseback, or afoot. The sound of the music could be heard from afar, and the tones of tailor Schneck's bass viol were heard over all.

"If I could only hide myself from them," said Walpurga.

"That's easily done," said Hansei, triumphantly, "that's all right. Let us go off together, by ourselves."

He went out through the back door and into the back garden and loosened the boat from the spile. While the chain rattled over its side, Walpurga laid her hand on her heart and said:

"You've loosened a chain from my heart."

They got into the boat and pushed off, and, like an arrow, the slender bark shot out over the smooth waters of the lake.

"The pastor meant to come," said Walpurga, when they had gone some distance.

"He can come some other time; he won't run away," thought Hansei. "We're rowing together, just as we did when we were betrothed."

Walpurga also seized the oars. She and Hansei sat face to face. The four oars rose and fell as if it were a single hand that plied them. Neither spoke a word; there was nothing to be said. The happy glances they bestowed on each other were full of eloquence, and the equal stroke of the oars told the whole story.

When they reached the middle of the lake, they heard loud music from the shore, and, looking back, saw a great crowd, accompanied by the band, in front of their house.

"Thank God! we've escaped that," said Hansei.

They rowed on, further and further, and went ashore on the opposite bank where, holding each other by the hand, they walked up the hill. They soon reached a bluff, where they rested for awhile. At last, Hansei said:

"Walpurga, it seems to me that you do n't want to be the landlady of the Chamois. Tell me frankly, is it so?"

"No, I do n't; but if you r'e really bent upon it—"

"I want nothing that does n't suit you."

"Nor do I want anything that displeases you."

"And so we'll let the innkeeper go his own way?"

"Gladly."

"We can wait."

"We can remain as we are, for the present."

"We'll soon find a good chance."

"The money won't grow mouldy."

"Nor will you. I've got a bran-new wife. Hurrah! hurrah!"

Their voices joined in merry song, and they felt as if relieved from a self-imposed burden.

"They may make sport of me, as much as they please, as long as we're happy together," said Hansei.

"Hansei, I'll never forget you for that. There's something else coming, too."

"There need n't be anything more. All I ask for is that we may keep what we have."

They sat there for a long while, and at last Walpurga said:

"Oh! how beautiful the world is. If we could only always remain together thus. There's nothing more beautiful than to sit here and look at the lake, through the green leaves and the gray boughs. There are two skies, one above and one below. Hansei, we have two heavens, too, and I almost think that the one on earth is the lovelier of the two."

"Yes, but joy has made me hungry and thirsty; I must have something to eat."

They descended to a quiet, desolate looking village that lay near by. Here and there, people were seated before their doors, chatting and yawning, to while away the sultry hour of noon. But Walpurga said:

"Oh Hansei, how beautiful everything is! Just look at that wheelbarrow, and that pile of wood, and that house— I don't know what's the matter with me, but I feel quite dizzy, and as if everything were smiling at me."

"You must have something to eat and drink; you're quite beside yourself."

They found the inn-parlor untenanted, except by myriads of flies.

"They've got lots of guests here, but they do n't pay anything," said Hansei, and they both laughed with all their might. They were so happy that the merest trifle provoked them to laughter.

After repeated calls, the landlady appeared, bringing some sour wine and stale bread ; but it was quite palatable, nevertheless.

They left and, when evening came on, rowed about the lake for a long while. The evening dews were already falling, when Hansei, pointing towards a distant bare spot in the forest, said : "That 's our meadow."

Walpurga seemed busied with other thoughts. She rested her oars and exclaimed :

"The little house over there is our home, and there 's our child. I do n't know how it is—" She could not express her feelings, but it seemed as if she must fly away and hover over the sea and the mountains, with all that belonged to her. She gazed earnestly at Hansei, until he at last said :

"Of course it 's our little house ; and our cows, and our tables, and our chairs, and our beds, are all there. Walpurga, you 've become a foolish thing ; everything seems strange to you."

"You 're right, Hansei. Only have patience with me. I 'm just coming home to it all again."

She had, at first, almost felt mortified at Hansei's words. He had taken her expressions so literally, and had not appreciated her high-strung feelings. But she quickly regained her self-control, and realized how changed she had become, and that all this was out of place here.

They returned home, and slipped into the house through the back door. They found everything quiet and in good order. They did not care for the people outside, or for their merry-making. They were enough to each other.

CHAPTER VI.

WERE these the same villagers who had talked so scandalously of Walpurga when, at Christmas time, the new clothes had come for Hansei and the mother? Had they suddenly become kind and loving?

It seemed, at first, as if they had really raised themselves to the noblest height, that of pure sympathy.

But now— If there had been a weather-cock to mark the feelings of men, it would have turned quite suddenly.

It all came about quite naturally.

There were few amusements still left to the villagers. The church and state authorities had ruled with a severe hand. It was, therefore, no trifle that the members of the provincial court would permit music in midsummer, in honor of the prince's nurse, for the sanction of the authorities was required, even for music.

All were delighted except, of course, Grubersepp, who made a wry face at their noisy doings, and, after he had taken his comfortable afternoon nap, went out to his fields. Such a noise and fuss

about nothing at all, would do very well for the little farmers, the woodcutters, the boatmen and the fishermen; but it should not interest a rich, sober-minded farmer.

But when they found that Walpurga and Hansei had gone away, and that the cream of the joke was thus spoiled; when even the country justice said that their behavior was shameful, there was quite a revulsion of sentiment, and many who had gone to the cottage by the lake in order to do honor to its inmates, now began to think of what tricks they might play Hansei and his haughty wife. There were many ways of annoying them, such as cutting off the cows' tails, nailing up the doors, breaking the windows— They were quite ingenious in inventing all sorts of mean tricks, but the presence of the justice acted as an uncomfortable restraint. So the crowd returned to the inn and amused themselves by inveighing against the he-nurse and his stupid wife. By degrees, however, another change in feeling took place. There are many who rejoice in another's misfortunes, and they chuckled over the landlord's disappointment. The feast and the great earnings he had expected, had both been failures, for the better portion of the company soon drove off, leaving him enough roast meats and cakes on hand to last a week. Out in the kitchen, the hostess was weeping with anger and vexation, which she would gladly have vented upon her husband. There was lively talking on all sides, and they found it a great joke to make sport of the innkeeper, and to advise him to add the day's loss to the price of the house.

"I shan't sell at all," said the host. "Such people shan't enter my house again."

When Walpurga awoke, early on Monday morning, Hansei was nowhere to be seen. The week's work had begun. Before daylight, he had taken his scythe and gone out to his mountain meadow, where he was now mowing the dewy grass. He worked with such joy, such pleasure and calmness, that it seemed as if an invisible power were guiding his hand. When the breakfast was ready and Walpurga had searched for her husband everywhere, and thinking that he might have gone fishing, had called out for him back of the house and down by the lake, she went out into the garden again and looked up into the cherry tree. Perhaps he was up there, although this constant plucking of cherries would be too much of a good thing. At the same moment, she looked towards the hill, and saw Hansei coming home, his scythe glittering in the sun. Walpurga beckoned to him. He quickened his pace and told her how much he had already done. "Ah!" said he, stretching his limbs while he seated himself at the breakfast table, "it does one good to work before breakfast, and then come home and find wife and child and mother, with something warm and good to eat, waiting for you—Ah! that tastes good. Sunday's beautiful, but a workday's much finer. I would n't care to be one of

your quality, who have Sunday all the year round. If I only had lots of fields and meadows and forests, so that I could always work on my own land."

"We'll have them, God willing," answered Walpurga.

They were a happy party at breakfast, and the child was full of life. They had been sitting together for a little while, when the innkeeper's servant entered and brought Hansei his beer mug with his name engraved on the pewter lid, and signified that the innkeeper desired no further visits on his part.

Hansei sent word to the host that he had better return the two hundred florins that he still owed him. He did not like to send such a message by the servant, but he felt that he ought to give him tit for tat.

"And tell him, besides," he called out to the servant, "he's often been warned that he might get hold of the wrong fellow. Just tell him that I'm the wrong fellow."

Hansei could not help feeling sad while he looked at the empty beer mug. Who knew how long it would remain empty. Perhaps forever. And it's no trifling matter to be excluded from the village inn. It's almost as hard as to live in a small capital where the prince gives entertainments, and to be unable to take part in them because you are not admitted at court. "There's a new tap," they'd say; "there's a new wine purchase; there are entertaining strangers there—" He was now excluded from the best thing there was in the village. When he looked at his tankard it was with sad thoughts, and with a prophetic sense of the thirst which in future he would be unable to quench.

Before long, woodcutters, on their way to the forest, stopped to see Hansei and tell him of all that had been said of him and his wife on the previous day. They roundly abused those who, in order to please the innkeeper, had spoken ill of an honest man, one against whom nothing could be said.

"There's no harm done," replied Hansei; "on the contrary, it makes one wiser to see how people will talk when their tongues are loosened."

"And your comrades, the huntsmen, said they had only let you go with them in order to have fun at your expense."

"That does n't matter. I'll soon show them that I've learnt wisdom from them."

"Was n't there one who spoke well of us?" enquired Walpurga.

"Yes, yes," replied Wastl the weaver, who felt kindly inclined towards Hansei, but feared to incur the displeasure of the innkeeper—"the Doctor. He's a real friend of yours. He said: 'Walpurga was perfectly right; it's the most sensible thing she's ever done'—and he also said that he and his wife would soon come on purpose to welcome you."

And now the woodcutters cautioned Hansei, and told him that

there were others who thought just as they did, that the old inn had been of little account for a great while, and that he would do well to apply for a license. He could n't fail to get one, and then he could run the host of the Chamois so dry that the hoops would fall from his casks.

Hansei nodded his cheerful approval. "Just wait, we'll show you, yet," he muttered to himself, clenching his fists, stretching out his arms, and raising his shoulders as if he would fell the inn-keeper to the earth with a blow that would make him forget to rise again. But Walpurga said: "We'll harm no one, and we'll let no one harm us."

"Have n't you something to drink?" enquired the woodcutters. They wanted a reward for the news they had brought.

"No, I've nothing," replied Hansei. "I must be off to the meadow to turn the hay."

The men left, and had gone a great ways before they ceased abusing Hansei. "That's the way with a beggar on horse back. He won't even give you a drink when you bring him news."

Wastl the weaver had not the courage to contradict them, although he knew that Hansei would gladly have given him something to drink if the rest of the company had not been present.

Hansei gazed at his forlorn tankard, for some time. At last, he said:

"I do n't care. I wanted to be all alone with you, Walpurga, and now we are alone, I ask nothing of the world."

"The innkeeper's not the whole world," said Walpurga, consolingly.

Hansei shook his head, as if to say that a woman can't understand what it is to be shut out of the inn, just like a drunkard whom the law prevents from going there.

"He's got no right to keep me out," said he, angrily. "I know my rights. The landlord must give drink to every guest who enters his house. But I shan't do him the honor to go there."

Walpurga, whose thoughts followed the woodcutters, conjectured they were speaking ill of them.

"We ought to have given the woodcutters something to drink. They're surely abusing us now."

"We can't stop every one's mouth," replied Hansei. "Let them talk; and do n't begin to repent now. We must be firm. What's done is done." With a changed tone, he added:

"The sun's burning hot on the mountain, and if we stick at our work, we can get our hay in this very evening. In such weather as this, the grass turns into hay as fast as it falls from the scythe. But there's something brewing in the lake. There may be a storm before we know it; and so I'd like to get the hay in under cover. Won't you go along?"

Walpurga was delighted to go. The mother also wished to accompany them, and so, taking their dinner with them, the whole family set out for the mountain meadow. Hansei carried the child, Walpurga took the barrow, and the grandmother carried the dinner basket. As soon as the dog saw them start, he followed after them, and was constantly running backward and forward, from one to the other of the party. The dew had already disappeared from field and meadow, when they entered the shady forest.

"I'd rather push a barrow," said Walpurga, "than ride in a coach."

When they began to ascend the hill, they changed about. The grandmother took the child, Walpurga the dinner, and Hansei the wheelbarrow. It was not until the child was asleep that Walpurga could take it on her arm, and she felt happy while carrying it through the green wood. Once, it opened its eyes and looked at her, but soon closed them again and went to sleep.

When they reached the meadow, they laid the child in a shady spot, where they could always have it in sight, and the dog remained there guarding it. Hansei and the two women worked assiduously. Hansei called out to Walpurga that she must not turn the hay so quickly, or she would soon tire herself, for she was no longer used to such work. So she went about it more slowly.

"This meadow was bought with your money," said Hansei.

"Do n't say that. Promise me, you'll never say such a thing again."

"I promise."

They found it warm work, and when Hansei came near Walpurga again, she said:

"The same sun that dries the grass makes us wet with perspiration. At the summer palace, they mow the grass every week. They never let it grow high, and take great care that there are no flowers in the grass; but they tell me that it does n't make good fodder."

"You think of so many things," replied Hansei. "Are n't you tired yet?"

"Oh no; I've been resting so long. Do you know what pleases me most of all? Just look," said she, showing him that her hands were becoming hardened by labor.

They heard the bell down in the valley striking the hour of eleven. This was the signal to prepare dinner. Hansei hurriedly brought some wood, a bright fire was kindled, and the child was so lively that the grandmother had to exert all her strength to keep it on her lap. While the soup was being warmed, Hansei sat by smoking his pipe. The three sat on the ground, eating out of one dish. After dinner, Hansei stretched himself out and said:

"I'll sleep for a quarter of an hour."

Walpurga also lay down, but the mother remained awake, watching the child.

Hansei slept but a short time. He looked pleased when he saw his wife lying on the ground, sleeping by his side. He motioned to the mother that she should not awaken Walpurga. The child was placed in the basket beside its mother, who slept on quietly, while Hansei and the grandmother were at work further down the hillside. The sun was already sinking when Walpurga awoke. She felt something touching her which thrilled her strangely. She opened her eyes, and they met those of her child. Its hands were stroking her cheeks. The child had crept out of its basket and had crawled up to her. Walpurga kept perfectly still. She scarcely ventured to breathe, and closed her eyes, lest she should frighten the child away. "Mother," cried the child. She still restrained herself, though she felt as if her heart must burst. "Mother! Mother!" it cried, more eagerly than before; and now she raised herself and embraced the child, and it let her do with it as she liked. Her heart overflowing with happiness, she sank on her knees and held her little, laughing child on high.

She sprang to her feet, held the child up with both her hands, and, hurrying to her people, exclaimed: "Hansei! mother! the child's mine!" and the little one held her tightly in its arms.

"Moderate yourself," said her mother. "You'll spoil the child if you show that you care for it so much. That's enough, Burgei," said she to the little one. "Put it down, Walpurga, and come help us."

Walpurga followed her mother's advice, but could not help looking towards the child. It did not turn towards her. It was playing with the dog, who had made good friends with it. Presently it tumbled down from the pile of hay. Walpurga shrieked; but the mother exclaimed, "let it alone!" The child lifted its head, laughed, crawled over to the grandmother, and then looked over at its mother.

The hay was dry. Hansei hurried off to fetch his cow team, as he was anxious to get the load home betimes. The wagon could not come nearer than the road, and so they were obliged to carry the hay down the hill and to pile it up in heaps. Walpurga said that she had slept enough and had been idle for a long while, and allowed her mother to help her but little.

Hansei returned. They loaded the wagon. Grandmother, Walpurga and child sat on top of the load of hay, and Hansei, at last, got up, too. Evening had set in. The lake began to assume a darker hue, and it was only here and there that a streak of light played upon its surface.

"And now the people may say whatever they please," said Walpurga, "up here, we're far above them all."

The mother and Hansei looked at each other, and their glances

meant: "How wonderful it is that Walpurga should have such strange thoughts about everything."

It was soon quiet in the little cottage by the lake. Its tired, but happy inmates were sleeping, and the whole house was fragrant with the odor of the new-mown hay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE folks in the cottage slept on peacefully, knowing nothing of the whirlwind of dust, the dark clouds that overcast the sky, the mighty storm, or the violent rain that followed. When Hansei put his head out of the window next morning, it was still raining. He turned to Walpurga and said:

"Do you see? I was right, yesterday. The weather's changed. Thank God! our hay's under cover."

"Yes," replied Walpurga. "What a day it was. It was all sunshine."

It rained all day. A sharp wind was blowing, the waves of the lake rose on high and lashed themselves against the shore.

"How good it is to have a roof over one's head," said Walpurga. Hansei again looked at his wife with surprise. Walpurga discovered everything anew. But now she was happy, for her child clung to her. It called her "mother," and called the grandmother "mamma."

Walpurga, with the child on her arm, was standing at the stable door and throwing bread crumbs to the finches who could find no food that day. The birds picked up the crumbs and flew away to their nests with them.

"They've got young ones at home, too," said she. Suddenly, she interrupted herself and said: "Burgei, we've been in the sun together, now we'll go into the rain together." She ran out into the warm rain with her child, and then back again into the stable. She dried herself and the child, and said: "There! was'n't it lovely? and now it's raining on our meadow, and fresh grass will grow, and my child must grow, too, and when we gather the aftermath, you'll be able to run alone."

Walpurga felt so happy that the child had become attached to her that she hardly knew what to do for joy. The child, too, was happier than it had ever been before. The young mother could play with it far better than the grandmother could. Her laugh was so bright, and she would count its little fingers and renew all those wondrous, childish plays which overflowing maternal love invented.

Walpurga did not care to eat anything all that day. She merely tasted a spoonful of the broth before giving it to her child. It rained incessantly. Hansei was out in the shed, chopping wood. Suddenly, he came into the room and said: "How careless we

were yesterday. They all know that you brought home so much money with you, and we went off and left the house alone. Have you looked to see if it's still here?"

Walpurga was filled with alarm, but speedily satisfied herself that all was still there.

"It must be put in a safe place before long. At all events, one of us must always stay at home, now," said Hansei, and returned to his work.

Time passes slowly on rainy days, and what better employment is there in such seasons, than to sit together and abuse those who are absent? At noon, Hansei said: "The Chamois must be crowded, all day long." It worried him to think that he could not be there. What a merry time he might have had. They might have drunk those six measures of wine, and now he must let the rogues get off without paying their wager.

Walpurga added: "Yes, and, from what I know of the people, I'm quite sure they're abusing us, because, thank God, we're doing well. It seems as if I'd never known people before, except by their outsides; but now I can see through them."

"Did n't you say that you would n't care what people thought?" replied Hansei.

Walpurga had a wonderful knack of divining the ideas of others. Her thoughts now penetrated every house, wandered to the pump by the courthouse, and into the inn itself, in order to discover what the people there were saying against her and hers. She was not obliged to wait long for confirmation. The joiner who, on the day of Walpurga's departure, had offered to sell his house and farm, now came to borrow money from Hansei, as he had received notice to pay off his mortgage. As an introduction, he thought it best to assure Hansei that he was his only friend, and the only well-wisher left him in the village.

Hansei plainly told him that he would n't lend money to any one, for that changed one's friends into foes. The friendly tale-bearer soon took his leave.

Living in the village had ceased to be a pleasure to them. The closing of the inn doors against Hansei was only the beginning. No one, of his own accord, bade him or his wife 'good-day,' and their greetings were scarcely returned. Walpurga, who had grown accustomed to being praised and esteemed by those about her, was often very sad. What vexed her most of all was that the story of the wager had been passed from mouth to mouth, and had become so distorted that it was scarcely fit to be repeated. It seemed as if the privacy of the marital chamber had been revealed to the world and discussed in the market-place. She felt insecure in her own house. Every noise frightened her, though it were merely a barking dog, or the elder bush brushing against the roof. Every night, before going to sleep, she would try the window-shutters, to see that they were firmly closed.

"I do n't believe," said she, "that great folk are half so bad as villagers."

"Indeed?" said the mother. "I do n't know anything about them; but from what I've heard, the quality are just as good and just as bad as the common folk. It do n't depend on the clothes."

"You're just like Countess Brinkenstein. If you'd been obliged to spend all your life in the palace, you'd have been just like her," thought Walpurga to herself, while she looked at her mother.

Walpurga's mind was agitated by contending emotions. She was obliged to reconcile two distinct spheres of life: the court and the village, and, in imagination, would often transplant villagers to the court and *vice versa*.

She was sometimes quite bewildered and scarcely able to distinguish what she had only imagined from what she had really experienced.

Hansei would listen to his wife and her mother discussing people and, with a smile, would think to himself:

"How changeable the women are; there's nothing consistent about them."

After Hansei had, for two or three evenings, resisted his inclination to go to the inn, he was merrier than ever.

"I'm glad," said he, "that I can give up a habit, if necessary. I really think I could give up smoking, too."

Those dull days served to show the difference between the dispositions of Hansei and his wife. To the superficial observer, Walpurga, so cheerful and wide awake, would seem the superior of her sullen, awkward husband. Her temperament was suggestive of life among the mountains; for there, when it is dull and rainy, everything is covered with darkness, but, as soon as the sun breaks forth, every object is lighted up afresh—the green meadows are brighter, the lake acquires a darker blue, every mountain height and every forest stream is revealed anew in clear and perfect lines. Like a beautiful flower, opening and revealing all its beauty in the glowing sunshine, Walpurga was always better and brighter in fair weather. Hansei remained steady and, indeed, gained in firmness while the bad weather lasted. When the storm raged, swaying branches and boughs to and fro, he resisted, as it were, and maintained his ground. He had something in common with the rough-barked, weather-beaten oak. The monarch of the forest does not don its robes of green with the first mild rays of the spring sun. Its boughs remain bare long after its neighbors are decked with foliage, but, in the end, it surpasses them all in strength and beauty.

The past year had indeed wrought a greater change in Hansei than in Walpurga.

The tree growing on a rock, drawing scanty nourishment from the thin crust of earth around it, and exposed to wind and

storm, will, when transplanted to a rich soil, seem to languish at first; but it will soon shoot forth with new strength. Thus had it been with Hansei. The sudden transition, from a life of care and toil into a new sphere, had almost ruined him. But in a little while, all was well with him again. And now his firmness and self-possession stood him in good stead, for he was obliged to prevent Walpurga's kind but strongly self-conscious nature from gaining ascendancy over his.

Walpurga was, at first, almost vexed at her husband's insensibility. She would go about in an angry mood, would curl her lips and clench her fists. She felt as if she must do something to punish the villagers. Hansei remained calm; it was not his habit to trouble his head with much thinking. It gradually dawned upon Walpurga's mind that Hansei was far stronger than she. Like a plant deprived of sunshine, and in spite of her happy home, she would have withered and languished because of the averted glances of her neighbors. She was so possessed by her anger that she was only sensible to that which, feeding it, provoked her the more. Hansei was quite calm, and Walpurga, for the first time, became fully aware of his strength of character. No one could make him change his gait. He was like a horse which jogs on, regardless of the dog barking at its heels, or which, when going up hill, will suffer no one to urge it into a trot.

In true humility, Walpurga bowed to her husband. He might have been wittier, readier, and more sprightly, but none could be better nor steadier than he.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE village council were in session.

Hansei was summoned to the town-hall. The messenger who came for him told him that there was to be a new assessment, and that higher taxes were to be levied upon him, now that he had come into property.

"You need n't tell everything to the last kreutzer," said he.

"I'll tell them all. Thank God, I've got something to pay taxes for," replied Hansei.

Walpurga listened with eager interest. She had been boiling with rage for many days, and now the time had come when her anger could find vent in words. She said she would go along to the town-hall where they were all assembled, and would, then and there, tell them what she thought of them. Hansei persuaded her that that would n't do, and now the messenger seemed the very man to serve her purpose. She burst forth in a torrent of abuse of the villagers, and asked the messenger to go to them and repeat every word he had heard. She threatened them with the house of correction and the king, as if both were at her service, besides



mentioning other punishments which were quite of his own invention.

"Come along," said Hansei to the messenger. While on the way, he gave him some drink-money and told him that his wife had not yet become used to things at home, and that, naturally enough, many a thing worried her. The messenger reassured Hansei by saying that, in an office like his, one was obliged to hear and see much which it was best to seem ignorant of afterward, and that women were very queer. Their great delight was to unburden themselves; after that, they were all right again.

Hansei was detained at the town-hall for a long time. The innkeeper, who was one of the councilmen, was seated at the table and found great pleasure in trying to get him into a tight place. His office protected him as with a shield. He tried to provoke Hansei to insult him, so that he might put him in jail and thus, at one stroke, disgrace the haughty beggar and his wife. Hansei saw what was in the wind, and every one was astonished at the polite manner in which he expressed himself. He never addressed the innkeeper except as "Mr. Councilman." "He must have learned that from his wife, who got her education at the palace," whispered the councilmen to each other.

In spite of the pouring rain that lasted during the whole of the meeting, Walpurga waited and watched outside of the town-hall. If there should be any trouble up there, thought she to herself, she would go up and tell them all what they were. She was insensible to the rain penetrating her clothes, for she was all aglow with excitement. At last she heard a noise on the stairs. Many were coming down, and she hurried home.

Hansei returned home, full of self-confidence. He had conquered himself, and the victory had been a greater one than if he had laid about him with cudgels. At home, he found everything in great confusion.

Walpurga, after walking about in the rain, had suddenly hurried home as if some one was after her, and had fainted as soon as she entered the room where her mother was sitting. She had recovered, but was still in a high fever, and her teeth were chattering. Once she opened her eyes, but quickly closed them again.

Hansei wanted to go for the doctor at once, but the mother advised him to stay at home and send a messenger in his stead. Before the doctor came, Walpurga was sitting up in bed and telling her own story.

Hansei informed her how he had killed the innkeeper with politeness. Walpurga's face suddenly lit up with joy, and she held out her hand to him, saying:

"You're—you're a splendid fellow," and then she wept until the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"That's right;" said the grandmother to Hansei; "that'll

clear her head. I was afraid it had gone to her head, but now it's all right. You can go now."

Hansei left the room. He stood at the window for awhile, looking out at the rain. "If your wife were to die, or if she should live and be worse than dead. If she—" He did not dare to think of the word.

The mother came out into the room and said: "Thank God! she's sleeping. When this is well over, the danger's past. It was no trifle to leave the palace as she's done, where they all petted her and showed her great respect, and to come here among these coarse, spiteful people. She'd become filled with anger and hatred, and it had to come out some day. Thank God, it's out now. It's lucky for us that the people have shown themselves so mean. Take my word for it—with all her goodness, she would have found fault with everything in the house, and nothing would have suited her, if this had n't come in the way."

The mother thus consoled Hansei, who nodded approval of her words.

Walpurga slept. Her cheeks were scarlet. Hansei, with the child in his arms, stood at his wife's bedside for a long time, looking at her.

The doctor did not come until the next morning. He found Walpurga lively, but very weak. He prescribed drastic remedies, and, in the course of a few days, she was quite restored. She now saw what danger she had been in, and how luckily she had escaped it.

It was not until then that she felt quite at home and perfectly happy.

Walpurga and her mother were down by the lake, washing clothes.

"Yes, it's our business to keep things clean," said Walpurga. "When I look up at the mountains, I see the rocks and forests which only men, with their chisels and axes, can shape into houses. Men's work is with whatever's strong and powerful. Even if others do flatter us, and we persuade ourselves that we're ever so great, we women are less than they are."

The mother smiled and said: "Oh child, your thoughts are far-fetched, but you're right, for all."

"My Hansei's a real steady man," continued Walpurga.

"That he is," answered the mother, with joyful mien. "He does n't talk as much as others do, but when it comes to a pinch, he knows what he has to do and how to do it, and that's just the way your blessed father was. You're very lucky to find this out so soon after the birth of your first child. I did n't know it till after my third, or, indeed, till I'd lost all my children except yourself."

"Good day to you all!" suddenly said a little needy-looking man.

"Why it's Peter!" cried the grandmother; "you here already? That's good. And is this your daughter? What's her name?" "Gundel."

"God greet you both," said the grandmother, who kept wetting and wiping her hand again and again, before offering it to her brother.

The little man's features expressed great surprise. It was long since any one had been so glad to see him; but, of course, he had come to a house that was overflowing with joy.

The grandmother took her brother by the hand, and led him towards the house. She felt sad when she looked at the poor little man, for his appearance betokened great poverty.

She forthwith gave her brother and her niece something to eat. When they had finished, she took Gundel out to the washtub by the lake.

"Just work there till dinner time, and then you'll know where you belong." She went back to her brother and again bade him welcome. The little man complained that life went hard with him. The grandmother went into the other room with Walpurga, and asked her: "How much money did you mean to give me for my journey home?"

"As much as you want."

"No.—Tell me how much."

"Would ten florins be enough?"

"More than enough. Give them to me at once."

Walpurga gave her a ten florin piece and said:

"Mother, I have n't given you a present since I came back."

She gave her mother several florins in addition to the ten which she had already handed her, and said: "Take this and give it away. I know that your greatest pleasure is in giving to others."

"O my child! you know me well. Oh God! I can now give something to others; that's the best thing in the world. You see, I've never been able to do anything for the poor."

"Do n't say that, mother; how often you've watched, day and night, by the sick."

"That's nothing; that's not money."

"It's far better than money."

"May be it is with God, but with men— Just think of it!—to be able to give money and money's worth to others! You make me ever so happy. I've had gifts, too, in my time. You do n't know how it is, when the hands of the giver and the receiver touch. And some gifts are like hot bread in one's stomach. It stills your hunger, but it lies there like so much molten lead. But there are some good people whose gifts do one good. Grubersepp's father once came to me and gave me something, and so did Count Eberhard Wildenort, who lives on the other side of the Chamois hill."

"Why, that's the father of my Countess," said Walpurga, interrupting her.

"Thank God! Then he'll live to be rewarded for it by his children. I never forget a name. Yes, I received presents from them both, and now they're again bestowing gifts through me. My child, I'll never forget you for this. To be able to give is heaven on earth. But while we stand here chattering, my poor brother's waiting out there like a poor soul at heaven's gate. Come along."

They went into the room. The mother put the ten florin piece into her brother's hand, and said:

"There, take it. I need n't go to my home now, for it has come to me, and if I never get there again, it's enough for me that I've seen my brother once more. There, Peter; that was to have been the money for my journey."

"Tsch-st-st-st"—with these sounds, resembling the hissing of a pot on a fire, did the little pitchman receive the gift.

"What does that mean?" asked Walpurga and her mother, in one breath.

"Tsch-st-st-st," answered Peter.

"What's the matter with you? are you crazy?" asked the mother, whose face had suddenly assumed a serious expression.

"Tsch-st-st-st," replied the little pitchman again.

And now it was Walpurga's turn to become angry and to enquire: "What do you mean by such capers?"

"Oh you piece of palace wisdom!" said Peter at last, "do n't you know how it hisses when a drop falls on a hot stone, and, d'ye see? it's just the same with me and the money."

The mother told him that he was ungrateful, and that the people thought that Walpurga had now enough money to make every one rich. He ought to feel very happy, for he had never before had so much at any one time. But the little pitchman, without making further answer, continued to repeat the strange, hissing noise. Walpurga went out and soon returned with another ten florin piece, which she gave to the little pitchman, who then said:

"There! it's out now; I can pay all my debts and buy me a goat, besides," and, striking the pieces of money together, he sang:

What's the best? aye, what's the best?
To be free from debt or care,
And have a little money to spare—
That's the best; aye, that's the best.

The mother was now quite happy again. She resolved to be prudent and economical in dispensing her gifts. In imagination, she already saw the people whose want she could now alleviate, and perhaps remove. The joyful glances of those who were to be gladdened by her bounty seemed reflected in her calm and happy face.

"Oh you women!" said the little pitchman, as if sermonizing,

while he looked with sparkling eyes at his two pieces of money, "you women can't know what money is. I shall put small change for a florin in my pocket, and always keep it with me. Hurrah! what a jolly life I'll lead! What do you know about such things? You go by a public house of a Sunday, put your hand in your pocket and there's nothing there. But I'll go in and won't begrudge myself a treat, and wherever there's an inn, I can make myself at home. Wine and beer await me and host, hostess, daughter and servant treat me kindly, and ask how it goes with me, where I've come from and where I'm going to; and when I leave, they go with me part of the way, and ask me to come again. And why do they do so? Just because I've got money in my pocket."

The old man shouted for joy. The grandmother cautioned him not to become dissipated, and Peter laughed until his face was nothing but wrinkles. He declared that he had made it all up, and that now he was less likely to go to the public house than before. "When you've got money in your pocket," he said, "it's great fun to go and quench your thirst at the pump in front of the inn."

"My Countess told me," said Walpurga, seating herself near her uncle, "that you knew her father."

"And what Countess is it?"

"Wildenort."

"Of course I know him. He's a man; the right sort of a man; a German of the old sort; a gentleman, a real gentleman. He ought to be king, he—" Heavy footsteps were heard approaching. Hansei entered. Peter quickly put the money in his pocket, and whispered: "I shan't say anything to Hansei about it."

"You need n't tell him; we'll do it, ourselves," replied Walpurga.

CHAPTER IX.

HANSEI did not stand on ceremony with his uncle. He had known him for a long while. They had often met up in the mountains, where Hansei had worked as a woodsman and Peter had gathered pitch. But they had not made much ado of their friendship; an occasional charge of tobacco had been the only exchange of courtesy between them.

Hansei now had something more important to relate.

"I was working out by the garden hedge that the band and the rest of the crowd almost tore down last Sunday, and, all at once, I heard some one say: 'You're quite industrious, Hansei;' and, when I looked round, who do you think it was? You can't guess."

"Not the innkeeper?"

"You'll never guess. It was Grubersepp, and he said: 'I hear you've stopped going to the Chamois,' and I said: 'That's nobody's business but my own'."

"Why did you answer so rudely?" asked Walpurga, interrupting him.

"Because I know him. If you do n't show your teeth to such a fellow, he'll hold you mighty cheap— 'See here,' said he. 'It'll be six years, come Michaelmas—ever since Waldl was born—and in all that time I've never once set foot in the Chamois, and I'm still alive for all. You'll find it'll do you good to stay away, just as it did me. I've laid in beer of my own, and if you ever feel like having a glass, send for it, or come yourself. May be you'll want a word of advice as to what you'd better do with your money, and let me tell you one thing, lend nothing to any one—' Now tell me, mother, tell me, wife, who'd have thought of such a thing? Who'd ever expect as much from old Grubersepp, who's always afraid he might waste a word? Now, Walpurga, you can see that the people are n't all wicked; good and bad are mixed together in the palace as well as in the village. When they find that Grubersepp keeps company with me, they'll come flocking back, just like bees to a mellow pear."

It was indeed a great event. A resident of the capital could not feel more highly favored if accosted by the king in the public street, than Hansei and his whole family now were.

Walpurga wanted to go up to Grubersepp's at once, and to acknowledge that she had done him wrong, but Hansei said:

"There's no need of being in such a hurry about it. I'll wait till he comes again; I won't go one step to meet him."

"You're right," replied Walpurga, "you're the right sort of a man."

"I've got my full growth," said he. "Is n't it so, Uncle? I'm done growing."

"Yes," replied the uncle, "you've got your full size. But do you know what you ought to be? You ought to own a large farm. You'd be the very man, and Walpurga the very woman for it; and now that I think of it, have you heard that the owner of the freehold at our place wants to sell? They say he's obliged to. You ought to go there; you'd be better off than the king, then. If you've got the ready money, you can buy the farm at half price."

The uncle now praised the farm, with its fields and its meadows, and said the soil was so rich and in such good condition that it was almost good enough to eat; and as to the timber, no one knew how much it was worth. The only trouble was that one could n't get at it everywhere.

The uncle was a pitchburner, and knew the woods well.

Walpurga was quite happy, and said:

"It won't do to lose sight of this."

Hansei seemed quite indifferent about the matter. Walpurga took his hand in hers, and whispered: "I've something more for you."

"I do n't need anything. There 's only one thing I ask of you : let me attend to the purchase of the farm, and do n't let uncle see that you snap at it so. I really think the farmer must have sent him here. We must be hard, and make believe we do n't care for it at all. I shan't neglect the matter, you may depend upon that. And, besides, I 've been a woodcutter long enough to know something about timber land."

Hansei let the uncle go away alone and merely said, in a casual manner, that he would take a look at the farm some time or other.

Grubersepp came that evening, according to promise. A maid-servant, carrying a large stone jug of beer, followed him. A wealthy farmer visiting the cottage by the lake, and bringing his beer there of an evening—such a thing had never been heard of as long as the village existed.

His whole manner seemed to say : "I 've got sixty cows pasturing on the mountain meadows." No one had ever heard a word of praise pass his lips. He was a sour-visaged fellow, and was chary of his words. He was what is called a drudging farmer. All that he cared for was incessant work, and he never concerned himself about others.

Walpurga kept out of sight. She was afraid lest she might humble herself too much, and thus vex Hansei, who behaved as if Grubersepp had been visiting the family for years.

Grubersepp enquired for Walpurga. Hansei called her, and when she came, the rich farmer shook hands with her and bade her welcome.

After Walpurga had left the room, they spoke of the best way of investing the money.

Grubersepp was a great enemy of the public funds.

"Yes," said Hansei, at last ; "I 've had an offer of the farm on the other side of the lake, six leagues inland. My mother-in-law is from that neighborhood."

"I know the farm. I was there once. I was to have married the farmer's daughter, but nothing came of it. They tell me that the property is in a poor condition. If you want to reap good from land, you must give it something in return. The soil requires it, and, if you should purchase, do n't forget that a good portion of the meadow land had best be sold. My father always used to say that the meadows of a farm are like a cow's udder."

Hansei was astonished at the amount of wisdom which Grubersepp had inherited, and marveled at his carrying it all about with him and making so little ado of it.

Grubersepp added : "The matter will bear thinking over, at all events, and I 'd be glad if some one from our village should get so fine a property."

"But you would n't let me have anything towards it?"

"No. I do n't owe you anything. But if you can use me in any other way—"

"Well, how? Will you go bail for me?"

"No; that I won't, either. But I understand the matter better than you do, and I'll give you a whole day of my time. I'll drive over there with you and value the whole property for you. I'm glad that you've concluded not to take the inn. The weather's clearing, and I'll have all my hay under cover by to-morrow noon. If you need me for a day, I'm at your service, and we'll ride over there. You know that when I say a thing it's so, for I'm Grubersepp."

"I accept it," said Hansei.

Radiant with joy, Walpurga stood at the garden hedge the next day, watching the wagon in which Hansei and Grubersepp were sitting. She was glad that so many people happened to be coming from work at about the time the two drove off together.

"Now let 'em burst with anger; the first man in the village is my Hansei's comrade."

It was no small matter for Grubersepp thus to give a whole day of his time, and in midsummer at that. He meant it kindly enough, but his main object was to show that the innkeeper and his pack could not make a man of one, while he, Grubersepp, could. He felt quite indifferent as to what people thought of him, but, nevertheless, it does one good to let them know who's the master, as long as it costs nothing to do so. When it costs nothing—that was the chief point in all that Grubersepp did.

The nearest route lay across the lake and straight up the mountain on the other side. But Grubersepp had an unconquerable aversion to the water, and so they drove round the lake and then up the mountain.

It was late on the following evening when Hansei and Grubersepp returned. Hansei reported that the farm was a fine one, and that it would be quite a fair purchase, although not so wonderfully cheap as the uncle had vaunted it to be. The place had been sadly neglected; but that would n't stand in the way, for he could put all that to rights again. Still, he would n't buy, because he'd be obliged to leave too much remaining on mortgage, and he'd rather own a smaller farm and be out of debt.

Then Walpurga said:

"Come, I've been wanting to tell you something for a great while, and you'd never listen to me. I've something more for you."

She led Hansei down into the cellar and, with a mighty effort, removed the stone cabbage-tub, after which she dug up the earth with her hands, and displayed to the astonished eyes of Hansei the pillow-case filled with gold pieces.

"What's that?"

"Gold! Every bit of it."

"Good God! you're a witch; that's—that's enchanted gold!" exclaimed Hansei. He was so startled that he upset the oil lamp which Walpurga had placed on an inverted pail.

They both stood there in the dark, shuddering with fear.

"Are you still here?" cried Hansei, trembling.

"Of course I am. Do n't be—do n't be—so—so superstitious. Strike a light. Have you no matches about you?"

"Of course I have."

He drew them from his pocket, but let them all fall on the ground. Walpurga gathered them up. Several of them caught fire, but immediately went out again. The sudden flash of blue light seemed weird and dismal. At last they succeeded in lighting the lamp, and went up stairs into the room, where Walpurga lit a second lamp, lest the darkness might again frighten them. Hansei hurriedly removed the pillow-case, and the glittering gold met his eyes.

"Now tell me," said he, passing his hand over his face, "have you any more? Do n't try that again."

Walpurga assured him that this was all. Hansei spread the gold out on the table, piled it up in little heaps, and counted it with his fingers. He always had a piece of chalk in his pocket, and he now took it out and reckoned up the money. When he had finished, he turned and said:

"Come here, Walpurga. Come, there's your first kiss as mistress of the freehold."

Hansei put the gold back into the pillow-case, and when he went to bed he placed it under his pillow, saying: "O what a good pillow; one can sleep sweetly on it."

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Walpurga awoke the next morning, she found the sack of gold in bed beside her, but Hansei had disappeared.

"Where is he? What's become of him?"

She dressed herself in a hurry, hunted for him, and went all over the house calling for him; but he was not there. She hurried over to Grubersepp's, but they had seen nothing of him. She returned home, but Hansei had not yet arrived.

What could it be? If Hansei had done some harm to himself—If having so much money had turned his head—O that terrible money! It had been lying in the earth, and there was now nothing wrong about it, for what has once been in the ground is purified.

She went out to the lake. It was still storming; its waves were high, and the sky was covered with dark gray clouds.

May be Hansei's destroyed himself—may be he's floating in there.

She stood by the water's edge and cried "Hansei" with all her might.

There was no answer. She returned to the house and, as coher-

ently as she could, told her mother of her grief. Her mother consoled her.

"Do be quiet. Hansei took his axe with him—the one that always hangs up there. I suppose he had something to do in the forest. He never shirks work. When he comes home, don't tell him how foolish you've been. The palace still clings to you. You worry too much about everything. Take my word for it, the world's quiet and peaceful enough as long as we're quiet and orderly. Hush! I hear him coming. He's whistling."

Hansei approached, whistling and bearing his axe on his shoulder.

Walpurga could not go forward to meet him. She felt so weak in her limbs that she was obliged to sit down.

"Good morning, Mistress Freeholder!" cried Hansei from afar.

"Good morning, Freeholder!" replied Walpurga. "Where have you been?"

"Out in the woods. I cut down a pine tree, a splendid one that must have felt my strokes. It did me good. But, first of all, give me something to eat, for I'm hungry."

"He can still eat; thank God for that," thought Walpurga to herself, while she hurried to fetch the porridge. She sat down beside him, delighting in every spoonful which he took. She had much to tell and to ask about, but she did not wish to disturb him while he was eating, and when the dish was half empty she held it up for him, so that he could fill his spoon.

"Now tell me," said she, when the dish was emptied, "why did you go out so early and steal away so?"

"Well, I'll tell you. When I awoke, I thought it was all a dream and when, after that, I found the money, so much of it, I thought I'd go crazy. Hansei, the poor fellow who used to save for months at a time, and felt so happy when he could buy himself a shirt and a pair of shoes, had all at once become rich, and it seemed as if some one were turning me round and round and driving me crazy. Then I felt like waking you up, that we might consider what I'd better do with myself. But you slept so soundly that I thought—Pshaw! is your wife to help you? Just you wait, Hansei; I'll show you—and so I got out and took my axe and went up the mountain. Day was just breaking. Although I was quite alone, I felt, all the time, as if there was a great crowd of people after me. Still I went on till I reached the pine. It was marked out to be felled long ago. I threw off my jacket and set to work, and when the chips began to fly, I felt better. Afterwards, Wastl came up and helped me, but he kept saying, all the time: 'Hansei, you never worked as you do to-day;' and he spoke the truth. We felled the tree and it came down with a crash. That did me good, and I felt better and better. We chopped off the branches and did three times as much as we generally do in

the same time, and so, little by little, all the foolish notions and giddiness left my head. Now I'm here again and happy, and I'm with you, Walpurga, my old sweetheart. I've been a woodcutter again, in downright earnest, and now I'm to become a farmer—that is, if all goes right."

And it all came to pass.

The mother had a wonderful way of disappearing when she knew that Hansei and Walpurga had anything to settle between themselves. One could almost have fancied that the cottage was provided with secret doors and subterranean passages, so suddenly would she vanish. She would reappear just as suddenly, and no one would know where she had been or how she had returned.

According to her wont, she had disappeared. Walpurga and Hansei searched through the house for her but found her nowhere. When they returned to the room, she was there.

"Mother, we've good news for you," said Walpurga.

"I see what's best of all, already," she replied, "and that is that your hearts are truly united. I do n't care to know any more."

"No, mother, you must know this. Did you ever imagine that you might be mistress of the freehold at which you once were a servant?"

"No, never."

"But now it is so."

Walpurga and Hansei, relieving each other by turns, told her that they had enough money to pay the cash down for the farm, and that the purchase was as good as concluded, because Hansei had obtained the refusal of it for eight days.

Mother Beate could not utter a word in reply. She folded her hands, and her features assumed an expression of sadness.

"Mother, are n't you pleased at it?" asked Walpurga.

"Not pleased? You'll soon see. But I'm old, my child, and can't jump about, the way you do. Look at the mountains over there. As long as they've been standing there, no one has ever felt happier than I do. I do n't know what the Lord means by giving me so much happiness on earth. He knows what He is doing and I accept it calmly and patiently. When you came home to us again, I thought my cup of happiness was full, but now I see there's more coming. Well, let what will come, I'm going home again."

The mother was obliged to stop, but Hansei said:

"Yes mother; you shall see something that you've never seen before in all your life." He went into the room, returned with the sack of gold, and opened it.

"Just look at that!" said he. "How it shines and sparkles. You can hold it all in two hands, and yet there's enough there to buy a farm, with house and fields and forests, and cattle and tools and everything."

"That's a great deal of money," said the mother. She laid her hand on the gold while her lips moved silently.

"Put your hand into it," urged Hansei. "Oh how good it feels to stir about in the gold that way."

The grandmother did not comply with his wish, but kept murmuring to herself.

The child in the next room cried, and Hansei called out:

"The freeholder's daughter's awake. Good morning, freeholder's daughter!" said he, while the two women went out to the child. Then he took up the bag of gold, shook it, and said:

"Just listen; you never heard such music before."

The grandmother lifted the child out of the bed and said: "Hansei, just do as I tell you, and put the gold in the warm crib of the innocent child. That'll bless it, and no matter whose hands the gold may have been in, that consecrates it and brings a blessing with it."

"Yes, mother; we can do that." Turning to Walpurga, he added: "Mother always has such pretty notions. You know it'll do the gold good in the warm nest. Yes," said he to the little child, "they've put lots of gold in your cradle. We'll take one piece and have a hole drilled through it, and you shall get it when you become confirmed. Only keep good."

"But now I must go over to Grubersepp's," said he, at last.

Walpurga was obliged to tell that she had already been looking for him there, that morning. She now realized how prone she was to give way to exaggerated fears, and determined to break herself of the habit.

The grandmother, Walpurga and the child were happy together at home, and the mother related that just three months before Walpurga was born, she had been at the farm for the last time, and that was to attend her brother's wedding.

"They can bury me up there," added she. "It's a pity I can't rest beside your father, for the lake never gave him up again. Oh if he'd only lived to see this!"

Our highest joys and our deepest sorrows are closely allied.

Grubersepp came back with Hansei and was the first to congratulate Walpurga and the grandmother. He advised them, however, to say nothing of the matter until the purchase was legally consummated.

CHAPTER XI.

ON Sunday, Hansei, Walpurga and the mother, went to church together. The child remained at home with Gundel. They walked along the shore of the lake in silence, thinking of how often they had gone that way in joy and in sorrow, and how they would feel when walking along another path and to another church.

The churchgoers whom they met on the way, greeted them coldly, and the grandmother said :

"Do n't let us take evil thoughts against others into church with us. We must leave them outside."

"But when one comes out again, they 're there all the same, just like the dogs that wait at the church door," replied Walpurga sharply. The mother looked at her and she shook her head, while she said : "Take my word for it, the people are not nearly so bad as they make believe to be. They think it makes them look grander and more important, if they show that they can be angry and spiteful ; but let that be as it may, if we can't make others good, we can make ourselves better."

"Give me the umbrella, mother—I can carry it better than you," said Hansei. This was his manner of expressing his assent.

The innkeeper drove by. Hansei saluted him, but the only answer he heard was the cracking of the whip.

"That 's the way," said Hansei. "If he 's angry, it 's no reason why I should be."

The mother nodded her approval.

Although the service had both edified and satisfied them, it did not prevent Hansei from having a mighty appetite at dinner that day, and he said :

"I think the freeholder can eat more than ever, but I 'll see to it that he works right bravely, too."

Hansei was quite merry, but he did not climb the cherry tree again.

The Doctor and his wife paid them a visit that afternoon. Walpurga showed the pretty gifts she had received, and Frau Hedwig was all admiration.

"I shall lay this beautiful dress aside for my child's wedding. You can't begin thinking of the outfit too soon."

The doctor had brought a good supply of bottle food. He placed the bottles on the table and said :

"Hansei, they tell me that you 're doing dry penance, and as I 'm a heretic, I 'll pour out the wine for you."

He proceeded to do so most generously.

Walpurga brought one of the silver-sealed bottles of wine that Doctor Gunther had given her.

Doctor Kumpan knew how to open the bottles. He praised the wine but bestowed still greater praise on Gunther.

"I think," said Walpurga, "that we ought to tell our honored guests what we have in view. They 're honorable people and won't carry it further."

"You 're right," said Hansei, and told them about the farm. The Doctor and his wife congratulated them, and were only sorry that such good people were about to leave the neighborhood. Encouraged by the wine, Hansei asked :

"Doctor, might I—be so free—? You see, you're really the cause of our good fortune. Would you do us the honor to accept a present from us?"

"Let's hear what it is. How many thousand florins will you spend on me?"

Hansei was quite frightened; he had not meant to go that far.

"You're a merry gentleman; you're full of fun," said he, collecting his wits. "What I meant to say, was—I've got three cords of wood out in the forest. I only finished cutting it last week, and I'd like to take it to your house."

"I'll do you the favor of accepting it. I see you're a real farmer already. You have an itching palm and money clings to it. Take care to remain so."

That Sunday had other honors in store for them, for when the afternoon service was over, the pastor called. He told them that he intended to leave for the capital on the following day, and reminded Walpurga of her promise to give him a letter to Countess Wildenort. Laughing heartily, Doctor Kumpan exclaimed:

"Ah! so her highness Countess Wildenort is your friend, and the pastor—"

"Doctor, I'd like to speak a word with you," said Walpurga, interrupting him. "Come, as quickly as you can."

She had learned one lesson at court: viz., that a firm yet polite manner enables one to check or avert many an ill-natured remark. There was a certain grandeur in her manner when she told the Doctor that, in her house, she would allow no one to speak ill of Countess Irma, just as she would allow no one to say anything against the Doctor. That would be just as false as what was said about the Countess, who, while she was merry enough to be his comrade, was just as good as he was. Walpurga added that she hoped he would not grieve her by speaking ill of the Countess.

The Doctor looked at Walpurga in astonishment. When he came back into the room, he said to Hansei:

"You've got a great wife; one whose friendship is an honor to any one."

Walpurga went to her room and wrote:

"My Dearly Beloved Countess:

"I take this opportunity to write to you. Our pastor is going to the city, and has promised to be kind enough to take the letter with him and deliver it to you. I don't know what else he wishes to do, but rest assured that whatever he wants is all right. He's very kind to me, and particularly so since I've come home again. And now I'd like to write you how things are going with me. I could n't ask God to make them better. To have one's husband, mother, child, and one's daily work besides! We've already made our hay, but not make-believe, as it used to be with us on the lawn at the summer palace. Do n't you remember?"



"Dear me! I say with *us*, and who knows whether any one at the palace still thinks of me?"

"Yes, I am sure you do, my good Countess, and my child, I mean the prince, and the queen and Mademoiselle Kramer and her father, too.

"Pray give my love to them all, the Doctor and Baron Schoning and Countess Brinkenstein. She's good, too, and Madame Gunther, also, if you should meet her. Oh, what a woman she is! I'm sorry enough that I only made her acquaintance the day before I left. You ought to go to see her every day. Your blessed mother must have been just such a woman as she is; and do me the favor and write me how my prince is getting on. He's fond of you, too, and if you get married, let me know, and, if there's an opportunity, Mademoiselle Kramer might send me the beautiful distaff. It would be a great pity if it had to lie up there in the garret.

"My husband was very sorry that he did n't get to see you, and I was sorry, too. I must always try to forget how you looked that morning, and when I try to picture my beautiful Countess and good friend to myself, I have to pass over that.

"My mother sends her respects; she remembers your mother and says that when one looked into her face it was like looking at the sun.

"My child was quite stubborn at first. You saw, by the prince, how stubborn children can be when they do n't like a person; but my child and I are very good friends, and the best thing in the world, after all, is to have a child, something to do, and a little property besides. Ah! to walk about with one's child is to have a fountain of life with you; one from which you can drink pure happiness at any moment.

"It often seems like a dream, when I think that I've been away; and it's well that it's past. I feel that I could n't go through it again, and all that I wish for now is to live happy.

"I kiss this sheet, for your hands will touch it.

"From your true friend,

"WALPURGA ANDERMATTEN.

"Postscript.—I've got some new songs here, but they're not pretty. I've no time to sing during the day, and if I did n't sing my child to sleep of an evening, I'd never have a chance to sing at all.

"Excuse me for writing so badly, but my hands have become hard already, and the paper and ink are very bad. Yes, that's what all bad writers say. Once more, farewell! I'm writing in haste and the pastor's waiting in the other room and the Doctor and his wife are here too. They're mighty good people, and if there are many wicked and envious folks in the world, they harm themselves more than they do others. My dear Countess, you can't imagine how much good you've done us. You'll be rewarded for it—you,

your children, and your grandchildren. It's as good as certain that we won't stay here; but there's the same sky everywhere. And when you see your father, give him my mother's respects. She has n't forgotten his kindness to her, and you are his daughter, and have your good heart from him and your mother. All that I wish is that you still had such a mother as mine. But mother's right: she says that there's no use wishing for what you can't have. I feel as if I had to write you a great deal more, but I can't think of anything else, and they're calling for me from the other room. Farewell! my best wishes, thousandfold, for your health and happiness. From my very heart, I wish you all that's good. Oh, if I could only go to you with this letter! But I'm glad to be home and mean to remain as long as I live. Farewell, all you good people out in the world."

Walpurga handed the letter to the pastor who left soon afterward. He was not fond of being with the Doctor, who was a sad heretic. Towards evening, the Doctor and his wife left, and Walpurga was not a little proud of the fact that all the villagers knew of the distinguished visitors who had called at the cottage. None of their neighbors could boast of like honor.

The week went by quietly. Hansei was absent for several days, during which time he concluded the purchase.

The little pitchman had asked permission to be present when the money for the farm was paid, and had requested this as an especial favor. His face brightened when he saw the heaps of gold, and when Grubersepp asked: "Do you like it?" he answered, as if waking from a dream:

"Yes, it's true; I could n't have believed it. I've often heard, in old stories, of such heaps of gold. The whole lot of stuff does n't weigh more than a couple of pounds, and you can get the whole farm for it. Yes, yes. I'll remember that to the end of my days."

Grubersepp laughed heartily. The little, gray-haired man must have thought himself quite young to talk thus of the end of his days as a thing of the remote future.

On Friday, the pastor returned. He had not seen Countess Irma, as she had accompanied the court to a watering place. He had left the letter at the palace, and was told that it would be forwarded to her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE weather-cock turned again and indicated fair weather. The sky was almost cloudless.

With men's minds it was just the same. It was rumored in the village that Hansei had bought the farm on the other side of the lake, and that he had paid for it in ready money. How could any one harbor ill-feeling against a man who was able to do that?

No; it was shameful, on the part of the innkeeper, to drive a man like Hansei, and such a woman as Walpurga, from the village. They were a credit to every one, to say nothing of the advantage it is to have such rich and good people in the place—people, moreover, who have themselves been poor and know how the poor feel.

Hansei and Walpurga now received kindly greetings wherever they went, and all spoke of their intended departure as if it grieved them to think of it.

The ringleader on the Sunday that the band had come to the house, the very one, indeed, who wanted to play a trick on Hansei, now came and offered to engage with him as a farm hand. Hansei replied that, for the present, he would keep the servants who were at the farm, and that, in the beginning, he would require people who knew all about the neighborhood and the farm itself. He said that he might be able to employ him later. Hansei was obliged to travel back and forth quite frequently. There were many legal matters to be arranged, and, besides, there was an old resident on the property who had a life-claim against the estate, for maintenance and support, and whom money would not induce to quit the house.

"And do you know," said Hansei, one day, "who helped me ever so much? We had quite forgotten that Stasi lives up there near the frontier, about three leagues from the farm. Her husband is the under-forester at that district. He showed me the forest, and he's quite right when he says that paths can be made, so that beams and planks may be brought down. Won't you go with me sometime, and take a look at our new home?"

"I'll wait till we go there for good," answered Walpurga. "Wherever you take me to, I'll be satisfied, for we'll be together, and you can't imagine how happy mother is."

Although the grandmother had, before this, rarely thought of dying, she often complained that she would n't live long enough to move to the farm with them, and thus, as mother of the farmer's wife, return to where she had once been a servant. All day long, she would tell Walpurga of the beautiful apple trees in the great garden there, and of the brook whose water was such that the articles washed in it would become as white as snow, and that, too, without using a particle of soap. She also extolled the virtue of the people who were living there, and cautioned Walpurga to use good judgment in dispensing the gifts which it would now be her duty to bestow on others. She knew the old pensioner and was indeed distantly related to him. They must treat him kindly, and thus bring blessings on the house.

Time sped by and the hour of departure gradually drew near.

Walpurga had already packed the clothing and household utensils, but was obliged to unpack them again, as they were needed. As the time for their departure drew near, the villagers becam

even more kindly and affable towards them, and Walpurga complained to her mother :

"I feel just as I did when I was about to leave the palace. I was always anxious to get away, but when the time came, I felt worried about leaving."

"Yes, child," said the mother, consoling her, "it will be just the same when you leave the world. How often one would like to go, but when the time comes, one is n't anxious to leave. O my child ! I feel as if the whole world were speaking to me and as if I understood it all. Everything, men and women especially, seems at its best when you have to part from it. That 's the way it is when one parts with life. For it is n't till then that we begin to understand how beautiful the world is, after all, and how many good hearts we leave behind us."

Walpurga and her mother were now able to talk with each other, to their hearts' content, for they no longer got an hour of Hansei's company. He spent much of his time with Grubersepp whom he accompanied into the fields, and from whom he received much advice and instruction.

One evening a messenger came, asking Hansei to come to Grubersepp's at once. He hurried off and did not return until late. Walpurga and her mother, curious to know what was going on, sat up for him. It was near midnight when he returned, and Walpurga asked : "What 's the matter?"

"Grubersepp has got a colt."

Walpurga and her mother almost split their sides with laughter.

"What is there to laugh at?" asked Hansei almost angry. "And besides, the signs are that it 'll be a white one."

They burst out laughing again, and Hansei looked amazed. He told them, in great earnest, that Grubersepp had sent for him, so that he might learn all about it, and he was just about to acquaint them with the latest bit of information he had acquired : namely, that foals are never born white. But he thought better of it ; for it occurred to him that it would n't do to tell the women all he knew, for they laughed so stupidly at everything. Besides, a rich farmer ought to be on his dignity with the women ; he would n't forget that Grubersepp was so, too.

Hansei received various offers for his cottage and was always provoked when it was spoken of as a tumbledown old shanty. He always looked as if he meant to say : "Do n't take it ill of me, good old house ; the people only abuse you so that they may get you cheap." Hansei stood his ground. He would not sell his home for a penny less than it was worth ; and, besides that, he owned the fishing right which was also worth something. Grubersepp at last took the house off his hands, with the design of putting a servant of his, who intended to marry in the fall, in possession of the place.

All the villagers were kind and friendly to them—nay, doubly so, since they were about to leave—and Hansei said:

"It hurts me to think that I must leave a single enemy behind me. I'd like to make it up with the innkeeper."

Walpurga agreed with him, and said that she would go along; that she had really been the cause of the trouble, and that if the innkeeper wanted to scold any one, he might as well scold her, too.

Hansei did not want his wife to go along, but she insisted upon it.

It was on the last evening in August, that they went up into the village. Their hearts beat violently while they drew near to the inn. There was no light in the room. They groped about the porch, but not a soul was to be seen. Dachsel and Wachsel, however, were making a heathenish racket. Hansei called out:

"Is there no one at home?"

"No. There's no one at home," answered a voice from the dark room.

"Well, then tell the host, when he returns, that Hansei and his wife were here, and that they came to ask him to forgive them if they've done him any wrong, and to say that they forgive him, too, and wish him luck."

"All right; I'll tell him," said the voice. The door was again slammed to, and Dachsel and Wachsel began barking again.

Hansei and Walpurga returned homeward.

"Do you know who that was?" asked Hansei.

"Why, yes; 't was the innkeeper himself."

"Well, we've done all we could."

They found it sad to part from all the villagers. They listened to the lovely tones of the bell which they had heard every hour since childhood. Although their hearts were full, they did not say a word about the sadness of parting. Hansei at last broke silence:

"Our new home is n't out of the world, we can often come here."

When they reached the cottage they found that nearly all of the villagers had assembled, in order to bid them farewell, but every one added: "I'll see you again in the morning."

Grubersepp also came again. He had been proud enough before; but now he was doubly so, for he had made a man of his neighbor, or had, at all events, helped to do so. He did not give way to tender sentiment. He condensed all his knowledge of life into a couple of sentences, which he delivered himself of most bluntly.

"I only want to tell you," said he, "you'll now have lots of servants. Take my word for it, the best of them are good for nothing; but something may be made of them, for all. He who would have his servants mow well, must himself take the scythe in hand. And since you got your riches so quickly, do n't forget the proverb: 'Light come, light go.' Keep steady, or it'll go ill with you."

He gave him much more good advice, and Hansei accompanied him all the way back to his house. With a silent pressure of the hand, they took leave of each other.

The house seemed empty, for quite a number of chests and boxes had been sent in advance by a boat that was already crossing the lake. On the following morning, two teams would be in waiting on the other side.

"So this is the last time that we go to bed in this house," said the mother. They were all fatigued with work and excitement, and yet none of them cared to go to bed. At last, however, they could not help doing so, although they all slept but little.

The next morning, they were up and about at an early hour. Having attired themselves in their best clothes, they bundled up the beds and carried them into the boat. The mother kindled the last fire on the hearth. The cows were led out and put into the boat, the chickens were also taken along in a coop, and the dog was constantly running to and fro.

The hour of parting had come.

The mother uttered a prayer and then called all of them into the kitchen. She scooped up some water from the pail and poured it into the fire, with these words: "May all that's evil be thus poured out and extinguished, and let those who light a fire after us, find nothing but health in their home."

Hansei, Walpurga and Gundel were, each of them, obliged to pour a ladleful of water into the fire, and the grandmother guided the child's hand, while it did the same thing.

After they had all silently performed this ceremony, the grandmother prayed aloud:

"Take from us, O Lord our God! all heartache and homesickness and all trouble, and grant us health and a happy home where we next kindle our fire."

She was the first to cross the threshold. She had the child in her arms and covered its eyes with her hands, while she called out to the others:

"Do n't look back when you go out."

"Just wait a moment," said Hansei to Walpurga when he found himself alone with her. "Before we cross this threshold for the last time, I've something to tell you. I must tell it. I mean to be a righteous man and to keep nothing concealed from you. I must tell you this, Walpurga. While you were away and Black Esther lived up yonder, I once came very near being wicked and unfaithful—thank God, I was n't. But it torments me to think that I ever wanted to be bad; and now, Walpurga, forgive me and God will forgive me, too. Now I've told you, and have nothing more to tell. If I were to appear before God this moment, I'd know of nothing more."

Walpurga embraced him and, sobbing, said: "You're my dear, good husband," and they crossed the threshold for the last time.

When they reached the garden, Hansei paused, looked up at the cherry tree and said :

"And so you remain here. Won't you come with us? We've always been good friends and spent many an hour together. But wait! I'll take you with me, for all," cried he, joyfully, "and I'll plant you in my new home."

He carefully dug out a shoot that was sprouting up from one of the roots of the tree. He stuck it in his hat band and went down to join his wife at the boat.

From the landing place on the bank, were heard the merry sounds of fiddles, clarionets and trumpets.

CHAPTER XIII.

HANSEI hastened to the landing place. The whole village had congregated there and, with it, the full band of music. Tailor Schneck's son, he who had been one of the cuirassiers at the christening of the crown prince, had arranged, and was now conducting, the parting ceremonies. Schneck, who was scraping his bass viol, was the first to see Hansei, and he called out, in the midst of the music :

"Long live farmer Hansei and the one he loves best! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The early dawn resounded with their cheers. There was a flourish of trumpets, and the salutes fired from several small mortars were echoed back from the mountains. The large boat in which their household furniture, the two cows and the fowls were placed, was adorned with wreaths of fir and oak. Walpurga was standing in the middle of the boat, and with both hands held the child aloft, so that it might see the great crowd of friends and the lake sparkling in the rosy dawn.

"My master's best respects," said one of Grubersepp's servants, leading a snow white colt by the halter, "he sends you this to remember him by."

Grubersepp was not present. He disliked noise and crowds. He was of a solitary and self-contained temperament. Nevertheless, he sent a present which was not only of intrinsic value, but was also a most flattering souvenir; for a colt is usually given by a rich farmer to a younger brother when about to depart. In the eyes of all the world, that is to say, the whole village, Hansei appeared as the younger brother of Grubersepp.

Little Burgei shouted for joy when she saw them leading the snow-white foal into the boat.

Gruberwaldl, who was but six years old, stood by the whinnying colt stroking it, and speaking kindly to it.

"Would you like to go to the farm with me and be my servant?" asked Hansei of Gruberwaldl.

"Yes indeed, if you 'll take me."

"See, what a boy he is," said Hansei to his wife. "What a boy!"

Walpurga made no answer, but busied herself with the child.

Hansei shook hands with every one at parting. His hand trembled, but he did not forget to give a couple of crown thalers to the musicians.

At last he got into the boat and exclaimed :

"Kind friends ! I thank you all. Do n't forget us, and we shan't forget you. Farewell ! may God protect you all."

Walpurga and her mother were in tears.

"And now, in God's name, let us start." The chains were loosened ; the boat put off. Music, shouting, singing, and the firing of cannon resounded while the boat quietly moved away from the shore. The sun burst forth in all his glory.

The mother sat there, with her hands clasped. All were silent. The only sound heard was the neighing of the foal.

Walpurga was the first to break the silence. "O dear Lord ! if people would only show each other half as much love during life as they do when one dies or moves away."

The mother, who was in the middle of a prayer, shook her head. She quickly finished her prayer and said : "That 's more than one has a right to ask. It won't do to go about all day long with your heart in your hand. But remember, I 've always told you that the people are good enough at heart, even if there are a few bad ones among them."

Hansei bestowed an admiring glance upon his wife, who had so many different thoughts about almost everything. He supposed it was caused by her having been away from home. But his heart was full too, although in a different way.

"I can hardly realize," said Hansei, taking a long breath and putting the pipe which he had intended to light, back into his pocket. "What has become of all the years that I spent there and all that I went through during the time. Look, Walpurga ! the road you see there leads to my home. I know every hill and every hollow. My mother's buried there. Do you see the pines growing on the hill over yonder ? That hill was quite bare ; every tree was cut down when the French were here ; and see how fine and hardy the trees are now. I planted most of them myself. I was a little boy about eleven or twelve years old when the forester hired me. He had fresh soil brought for the whole place and covered the rocky spots with moss. In the spring, I worked from six in the morning till seven in the evening, putting in the little plants. My left hand was almost frozen, for I had to keep putting it into a tub of wet loam with which I covered the roots. I was scantily clothed into the bargain and had nothing to eat, all day long, but a piece of bread. In the morning it was cold enough to freeze the

marrow in one's bones, and, at noon, I was almost roasted by the hot sun beating on the rocks. It was a hard life. Yes, I had a hard time of it when I was young. Thank God, it has n't harmed me any. But I shan't forget it; and let's be right industrious and give all we can to the poor. I never would have believed that I'd live to call a single tree or a handful of earth my own; and now that God has given me so much, let's try and deserve it all."

Hansei's eyes blinked, as if there was something in them, and he pulled his hat down over his forehead. Now, while he was pulling himself up by the roots as it were, he could not help thinking of how thoroughly he had become engrafted into the neighborhood by the work of his hands and by habit. He had felled many a tree, but he knew full well how hard it was to remove the stumps.

The foal grew restive. Gruberwaldl, who had come with them in order to hold it, was not strong enough, and one of the boatmen was obliged to go to his assistance.

"Stay with the foal," said Hansei. "I'll take the oar."

"And I, too," cried Walpurga. "Who knows when I'll have another chance? Ah! how often I've rowed on the lake with you and my blessed father."

Hansei and Walpurga sat side by side plying their oars in perfect time. It did them both good to have some employment which would enable them to work off the excitement.

"I shall miss the water," said Walpurga; "without the lake, life'll seem so dull and dry. I felt that, while I was in the city."

Hansei did not answer.

"At the summer palace, there's a pond with swans swimming about in it," said she, but still received no answer. She looked around and a feeling of anger arose within her. When she said anything at the palace, it was always listened to.

In a sorrowful tone, she added: "It would have been better if we'd moved in the spring; it would have been much easier to get used to things."

"May be it would," replied Hansei, at last, "but I've got to hew wood in the winter. Walpurga, let's make life pleasant to each other, and not sad. I shall have enough on my shoulders, and can't have you and your palace thoughts besides."

Walpurga quickly answered: "I'll throw this ring, which the queen gave me, into the lake, to prove that I've stopped thinking of the palace."

"There's no need of that. The ring's worth a nice sum and, besides that, it's an honorable keepsake. You must do just as I do."

"Yes; only remain strong and true."

The mother suddenly stood up before them. Her features were illumined with a strange expression and she said:

"Children! Hold fast to the good fortune that you have. You've

gone through fire and water together; for it was fire when you were surrounded by joy and love and every one greeted you with kindness—and you passed through the water, when the wickedness of others stung you to the soul. At that time, the water was up to your neck, and yet you were n't drowned. Now you've got over it all. And when my last hour comes, do n't weep for me; for through you I've enjoyed all the happiness a mother's heart can have in this world."

She knelt down, scooped up some water with her hand and sprinkled it over Hansei's, and also over Walpurga's face.

They rowed on, in silence. The mother laid her head on a roll of bedding and closed her eyes. Her face wore a strange expression. After awhile she opened her eyes again, and casting a glance full of happiness on her children, she said:

"Sing and be merry. Sing the song that father and I so often sang together; that one verse, the good one."

Hansei and Walpurga plied the oars while they sang:

Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee;
And swiftly speed the hours by,
When thou art near to me.

They repeated the verse again, although, at times, the joyous shouting of the child and the neighing of the foal bade fair to interrupt it.

The singing and shouting was suddenly interrupted by a young sailor, who cried out:

"There 's some one floating there! it 's a human being—there! the head 's over water! do n't you see it? there 's the long, coal-black hair floating on the water. Some woman 's drowned herself, or has fallen overboard."

Every one in the boat looked towards the point indicated. The object rose and fell on the waves. It appeared to be a human face that would, now and then, rise to the surface and sink again. All were dumb with terror, and Hansei rubbed his eyes, asking himself: "Was it imagination or was it reality?" He thought he had recognized the face of Black Esther rising on the waves and sinking again. It floated on, further and further, and, at last, sank out of sight.

"It 's nothing," said Walpurga, "it 's nothing. Do n't let us make ourselves unhappy."

"You 're a stupid fellow," said the old boatman, scolding his comrade. "It was nothing but a dead crow or some other bird floating on the water. Who 'd say such a thing?" added he in a whisper. "If we get but little drink money, it 'll be your fault. They were so happy that they 'd have given us a thaler at least, but now you can see Hansei rummaging in his purse. He 's looking for small change, and it 's all your fault."

Without knowing why, Hansei had indeed pulled out his purse, and was fumbling in it. He was so bewildered with what he had seen—it was true, after all—but it could not be right—just now—to-day, when all was forgiven and past; and, after all, he had n't sinned.

In order to regain his composure, he counted out several pieces of money. That restored his spirits. He was able to count; his senses had returned. He had resigned the oar and, with his piece of chalk, had actually been making some calculations on the bench. But he soon rubbed them out again.

"There's the other shore," said he, looking up and lifting his hat, "we'll soon be there. I can see the wagon and horses and Uncle Peter there already. I can see our blue chest."

"Heavens!" cried Walpurga, and the oar remained motionless in her hands. "Heavens! Who is it? Who is that figure? I can take my oath that, while we were singing, I thought to myself: If only my good Countess Irma could see us sitting in the boat together. It would have made her happy to see that, and just then it seemed to me as if—"

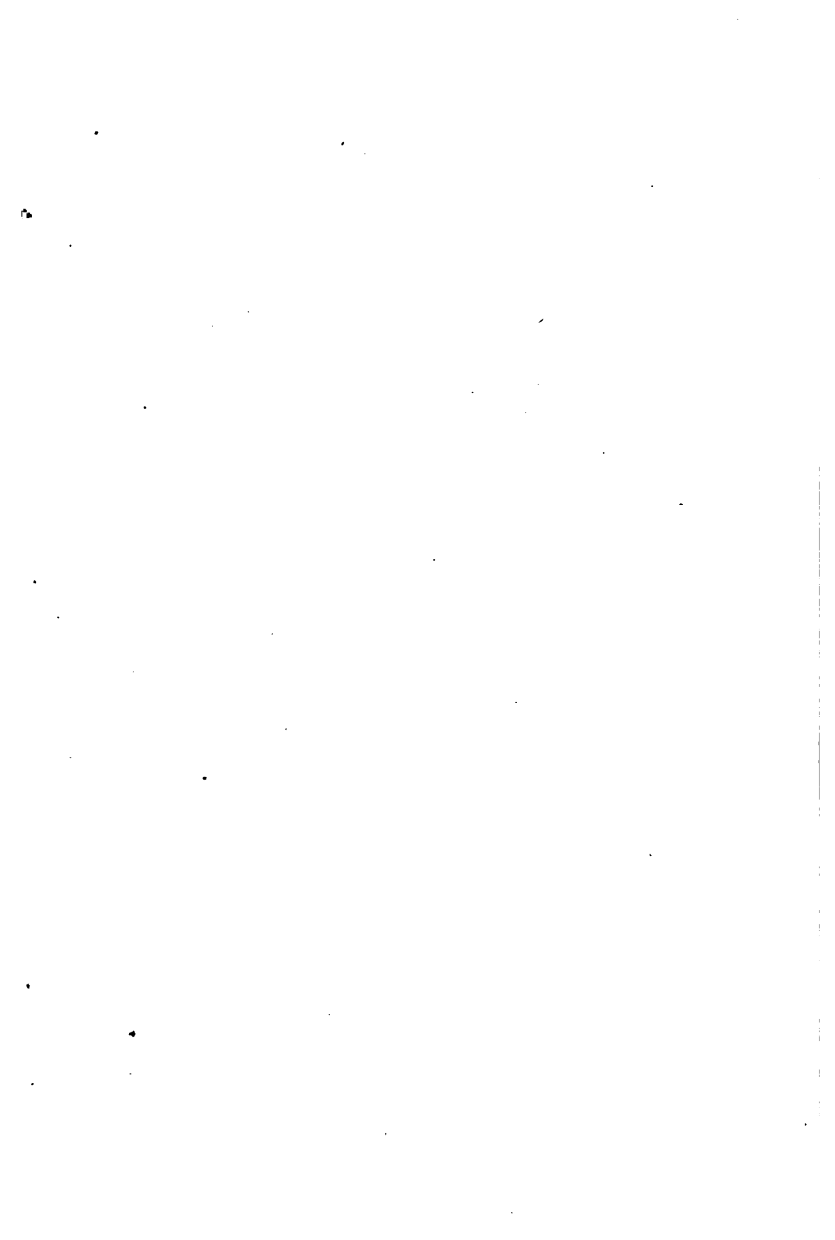
"I'm glad," said Hansei, interrupting her, "that we're getting to shore. If this lasts much longer, we'll all lose our wits."

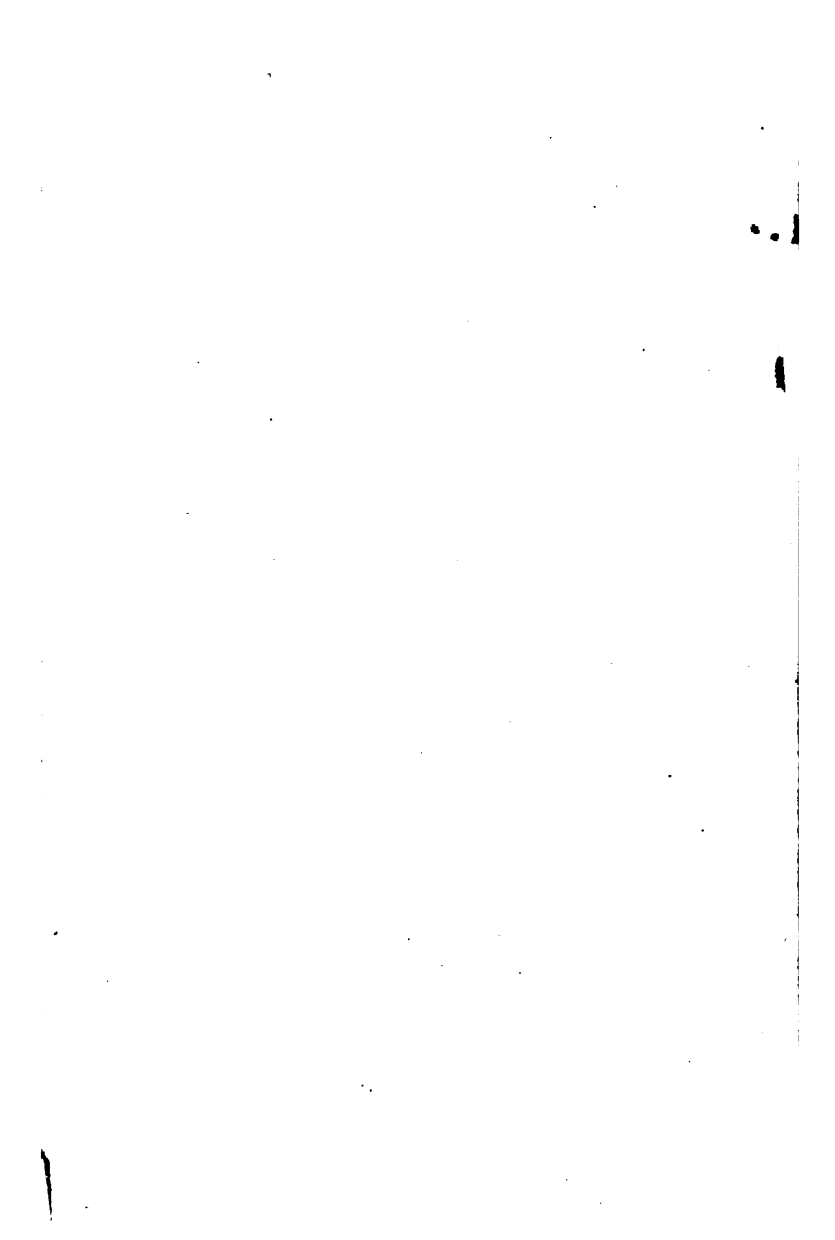
On the distant shore, some one was seen running to and fro. The figure was wrapped in a flowing dress, and suddenly started when the wind wafted the sound of music across towards her. She sank to the earth and seemed to be crouching on the bank. Now that the sound had died away, she arose and fled, disappearing among the bushes.

"Did n't you see anything?" asked Walpurga again.

"Yes, indeed. If I was superstitious, and it was n't in the daytime, I'd have thought it was the Lady of the Lake."

The boat reached the bank. Walpurga was the first to leap ashore. Leaving her people, she ran towards the bushes as fast as she could, and there, behind the willows, the figure fell on her neck and fainted.





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